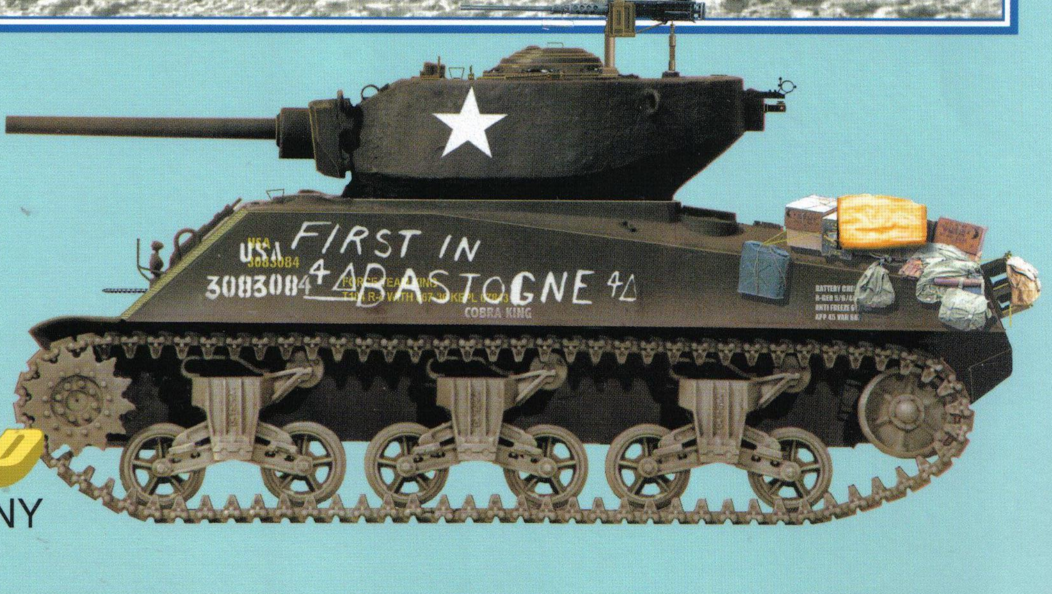
ARMOR AT WAR SERIES

7036

The Sherman at War

(2) The US Army in the European Theater 1943-45

Steven J. Zaloga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Text and color plates by Steven Zaloga

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603-609 Castle Peak Road
Kong Nam Industrial Building
10/F, B1, Tsuen Wan
New Territories, Hong Kong
www.concord-publications.com

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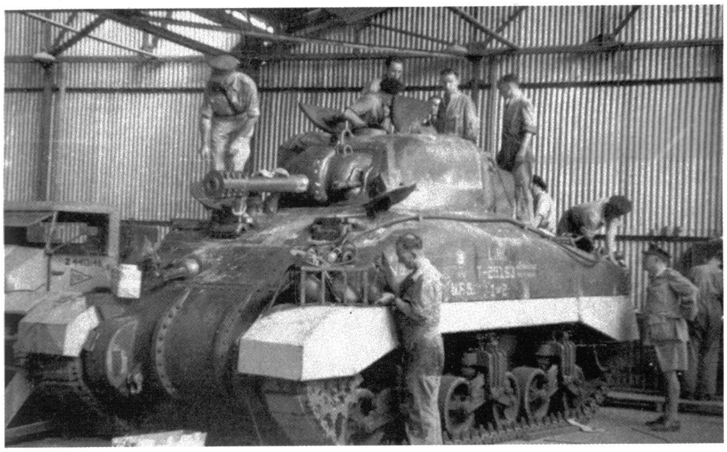
ISBN 962-361-669-4
printed in Hong Kong

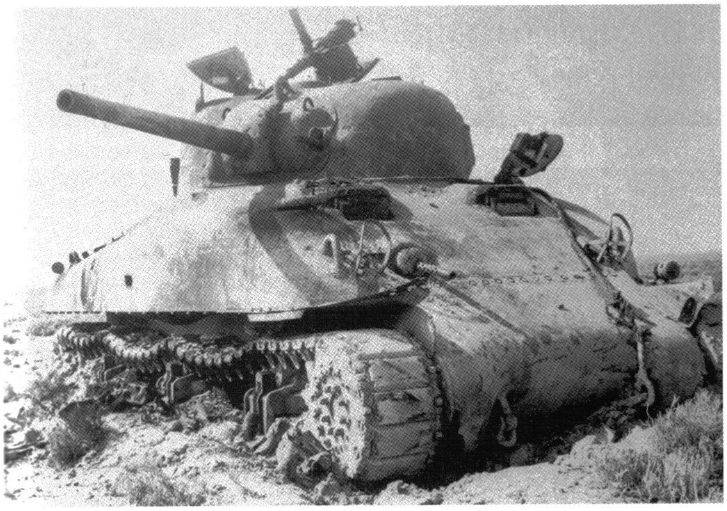
Introduction

This book follows an earlier one in the "Armor at War" (No. 7001) series published in 1994. This book consists of a new series of photos of the M4 Sherman in combat with the US Army in the European Theater during World War II. The M4 Sherman was the most widely used US tank of the war, with more Shermans manufactured than all German tanks combined. This book provides more detailed coverage of some of the campaigns than the previous volume, especially new coverage of the tank fighting in Italy in 1944-45, and more in-depth coverage of the fighting along the German Siegfried line in the autumn and winter of 1944-45. The author has discovered a large number of new, previously unpublished photos of the M4 in combat. These photos include a series of photos of tanks of the US Ninth Army that were not released to the public and which remained buried in the archives until recently. It also includes a number of rare photos from private collections. Unless otherwise noted, these photos are all official US Army Signal Corps or US Navy photos. The author would like to thank the archivists who have helped in locating these photos including Charles Lemons at the Patton Museum, Ft. Knox; Randy Hackenburg, at Special Collections, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks; and Alan Aimone, at Special Collections, US Military Academy, West Point.

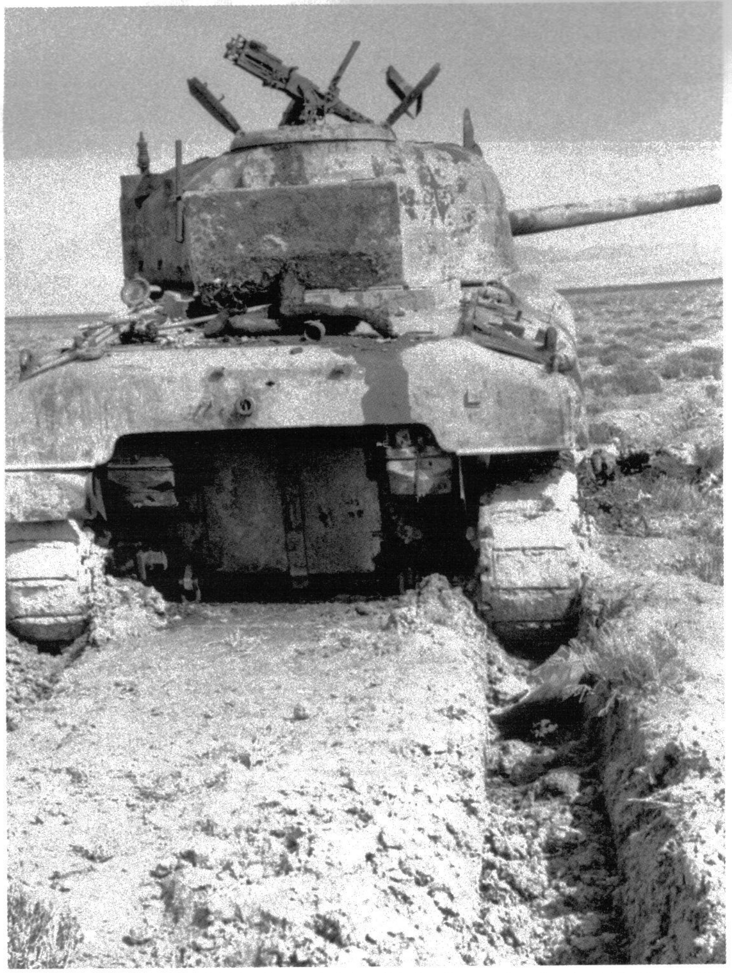
North African Debut



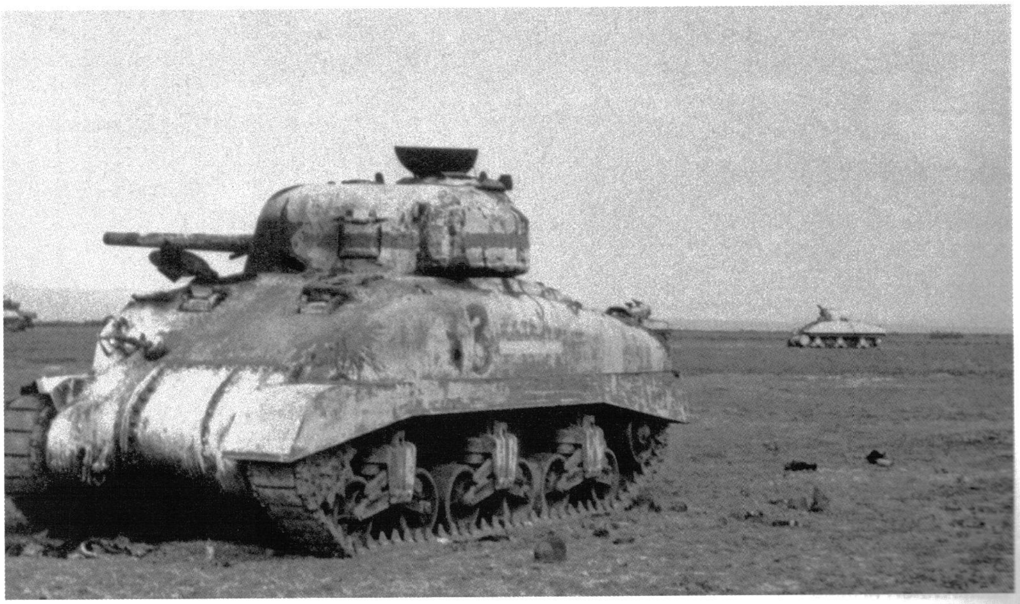
The M4A1 medium tank was first deployed with the British 8th Army in North Africa in 1942. This is a rare view of the fifth production tank, registration number T-25193 named "Link", in a workshop in Egypt having its sand-shields fitted before being issue to troops. It is still fitted with the short M2 75mm gun with counter-weights. In British service, the M4 was named the Sherman after the Civil War general, but this name was seldom used by the US Army during the war. (Jarrett collection, MHI Archives)



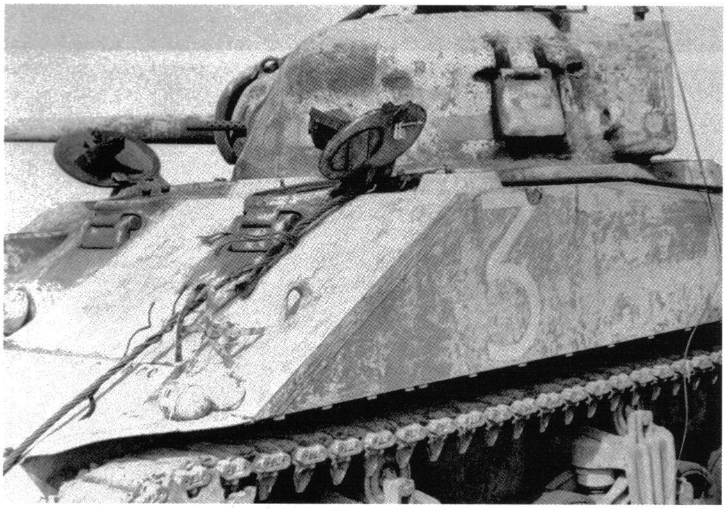
The combat debut of the M4A1 with American troops was not auspicious. This is a M4A1 of the 1st Arm'd. Regt., 1st Armored Div. which was knocked out in fighting with the Afrika Korps at Sidi bou Zid on 14-15 February 1943 during the German counter-attack through the Kasserine Pass. The heavy losses of M4 tanks in these engagements had more to do with inexperience than with any technical problems with the tank.



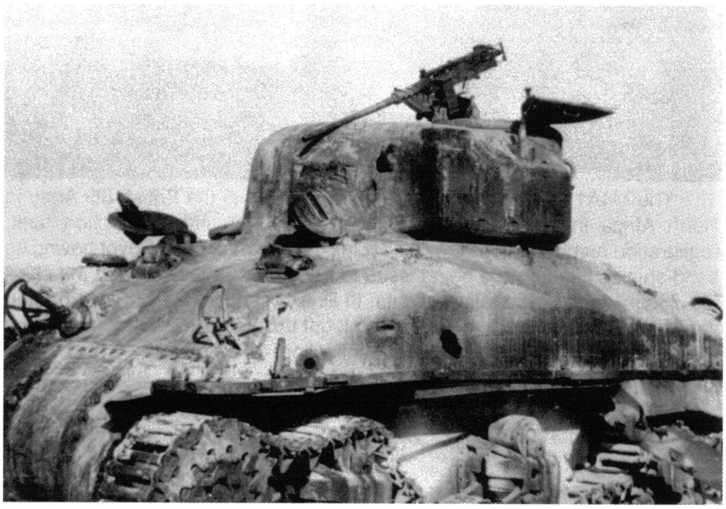
A rear view of a M4A1 from 1st Arm'd Regt. knocked out at Sidi bou Zid. The tank has sunken into the soft soil, a problem that would plague to M4 in service due to its narrow track.



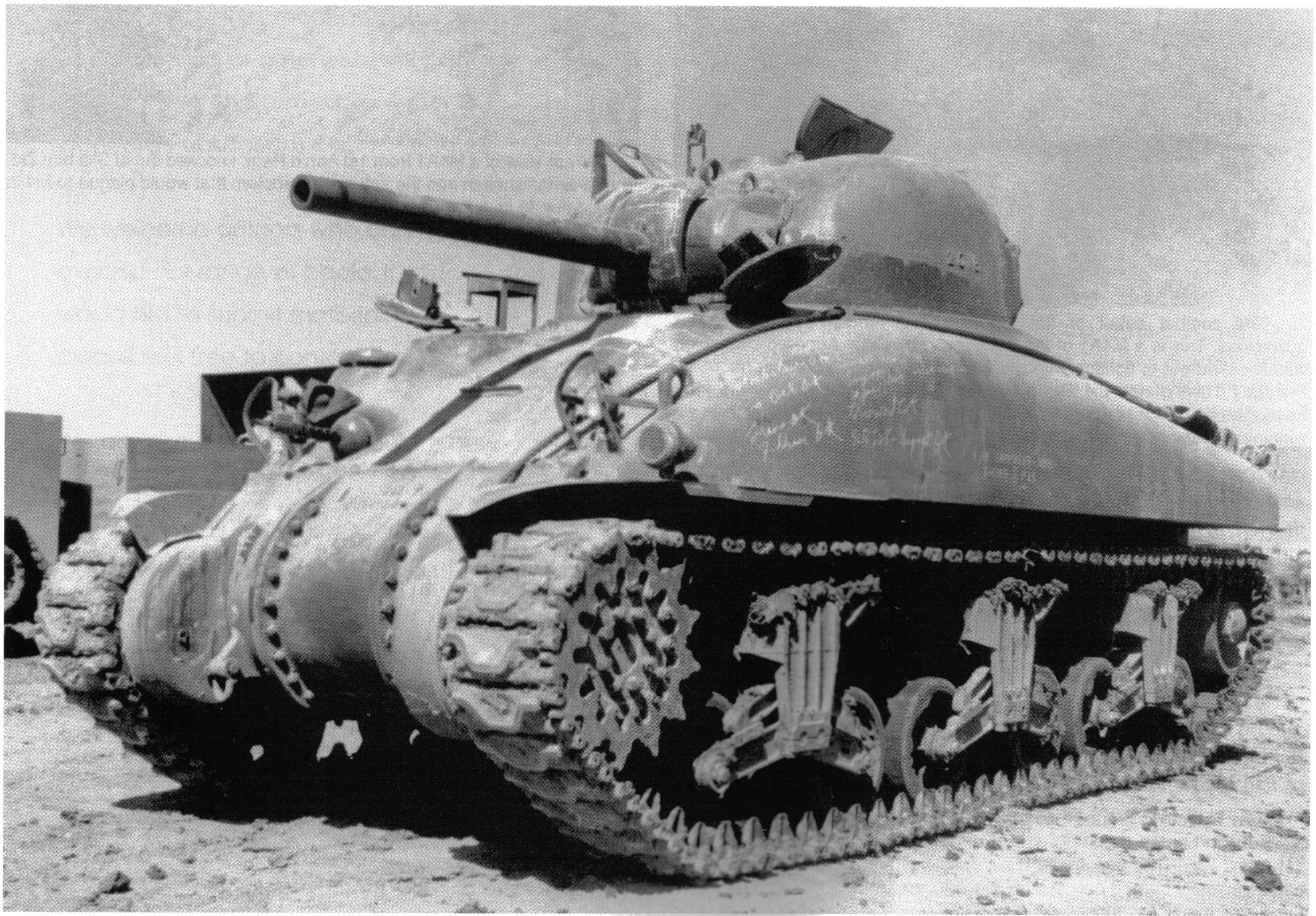
The battlefield around Sidi bou Zid is littered with burned out M4A1 tanks of the 1st Arm'd Regt. The tank in the foreground has completely burned out, and as a result the turret markings appear darker. These M4A1 are early production types evident from the hinged driver's visors and the early D37893 vertical volute suspension.



Although the 1st Armored Regiment was largely equipped with the cast hull M4A1, it also had the M4 with welded hull as seen here, a tank from Co. F, 1st Arm'd Regt. knocked out during the 15 February counterattack by Combat Command C southwest of Sidi Salem. This tank was knocked out by a 5cm round from a German Pz.Kpfw III tank. These are early production M4 tanks with the early suspension, early pattern armored visors for the driver and co-driver, and the early gun mantlet without the armored collars.

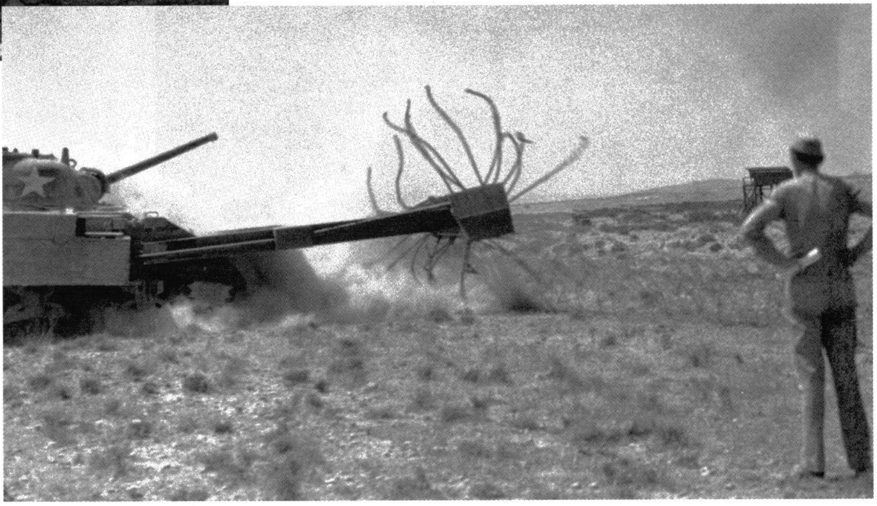


A M4A1 from 1st Arm'd Regt. knocked out near Tell el Aggagir. This tank has taken several hits and is completely burned out after having suffered an internal ammunition fire. There is a common myth that the Sherman's propensity to fire was due to its gasoline engine. In fact, ammunition fires were the main threat.

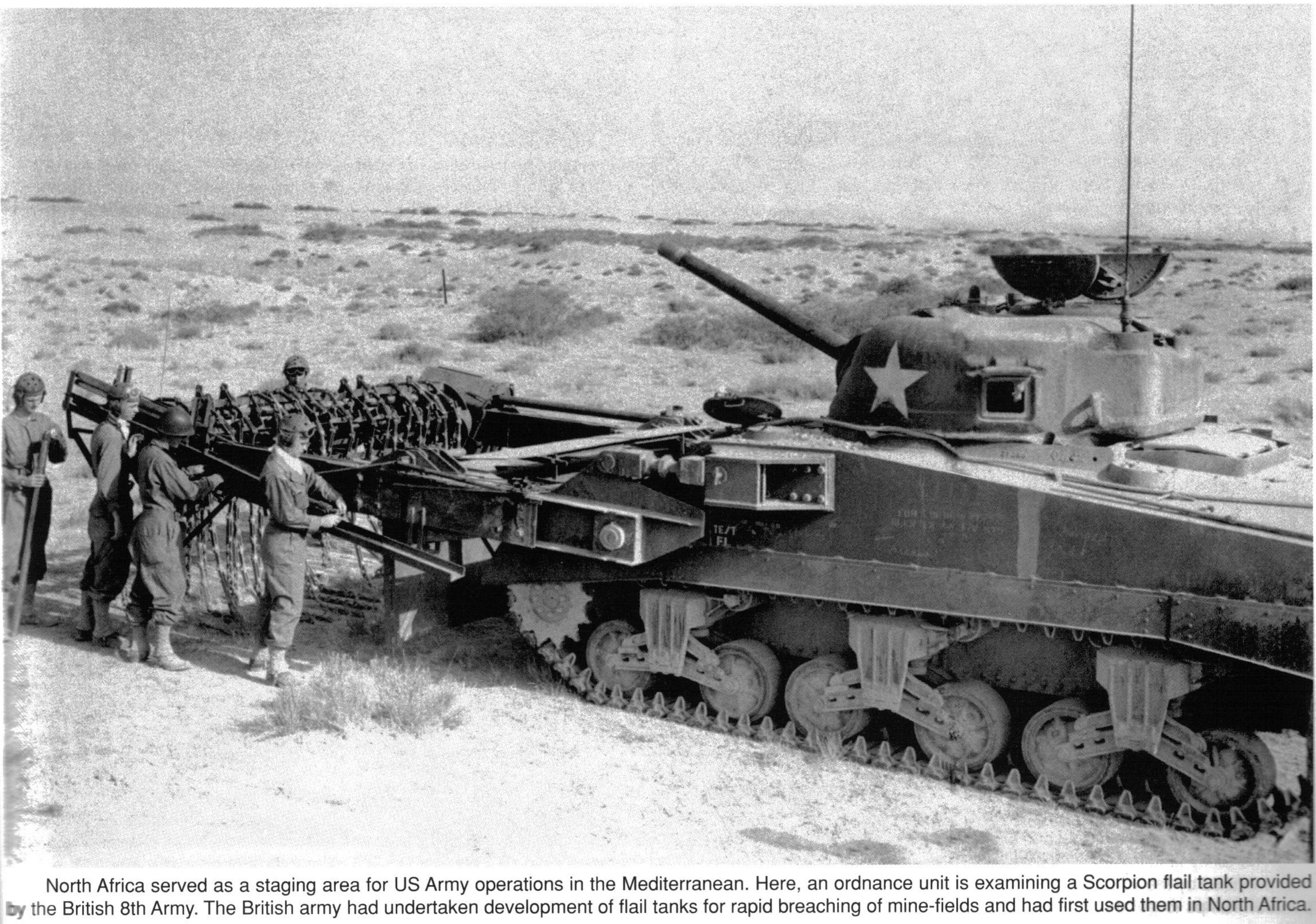


The losses suffered during the Kasserine Pass disaster were replaced by new supplies. This M4A1 has just arrived at Oran in North Africa on 5 April 1943. Unlike the M4A1 tanks lost at Kasserine Pass, it is the newer version with the improved D47527 suspension, and the revised hull casting with driver's periscopes replacing the hinged view slits.

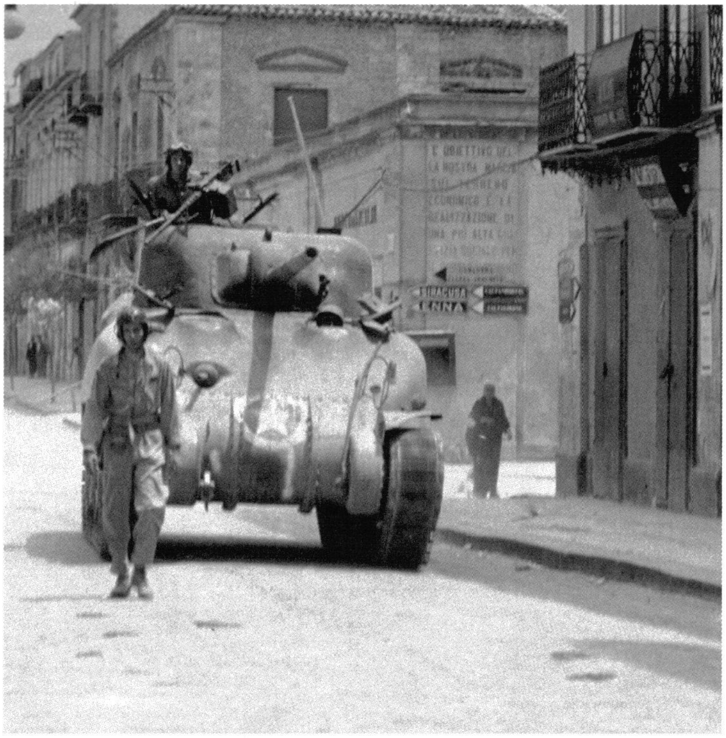
The 1st Armored Division was not the only US tank unit in Tunisia. Here, a M4A1 of Co. A, 751st Tank Battalion moves down a street in Bizerte following their entry into the city on 7 May 1943. The capture of Bizerte and the surrounding area marked the end of the North African campaign. (Patton Museum)



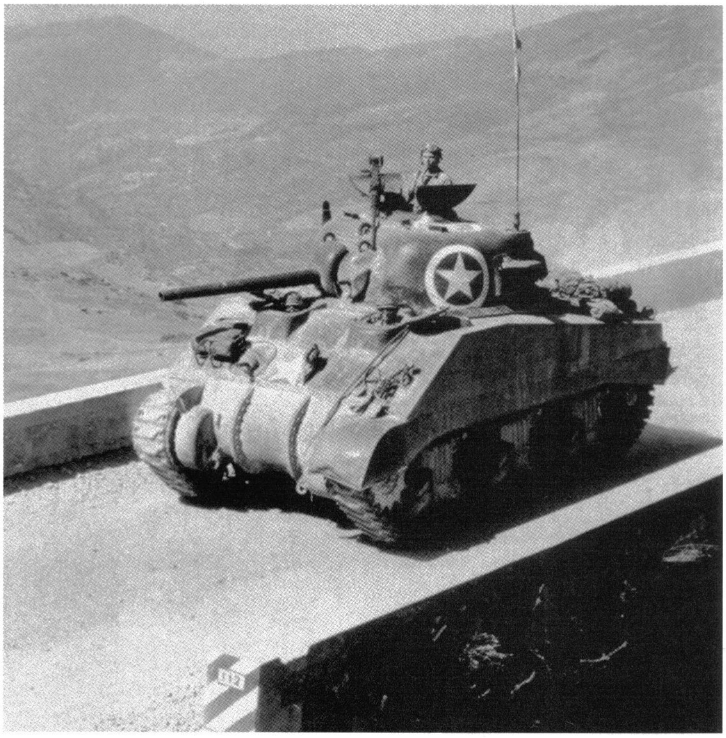
The Scorpion detonated mines by "flailing" them with heavy chains. Although the provision of 100 of these was requested by the European Theater HQ, the Ordnance Dept. instead decided to supply US Army units with roller-type mine exploders for operations in Europe.



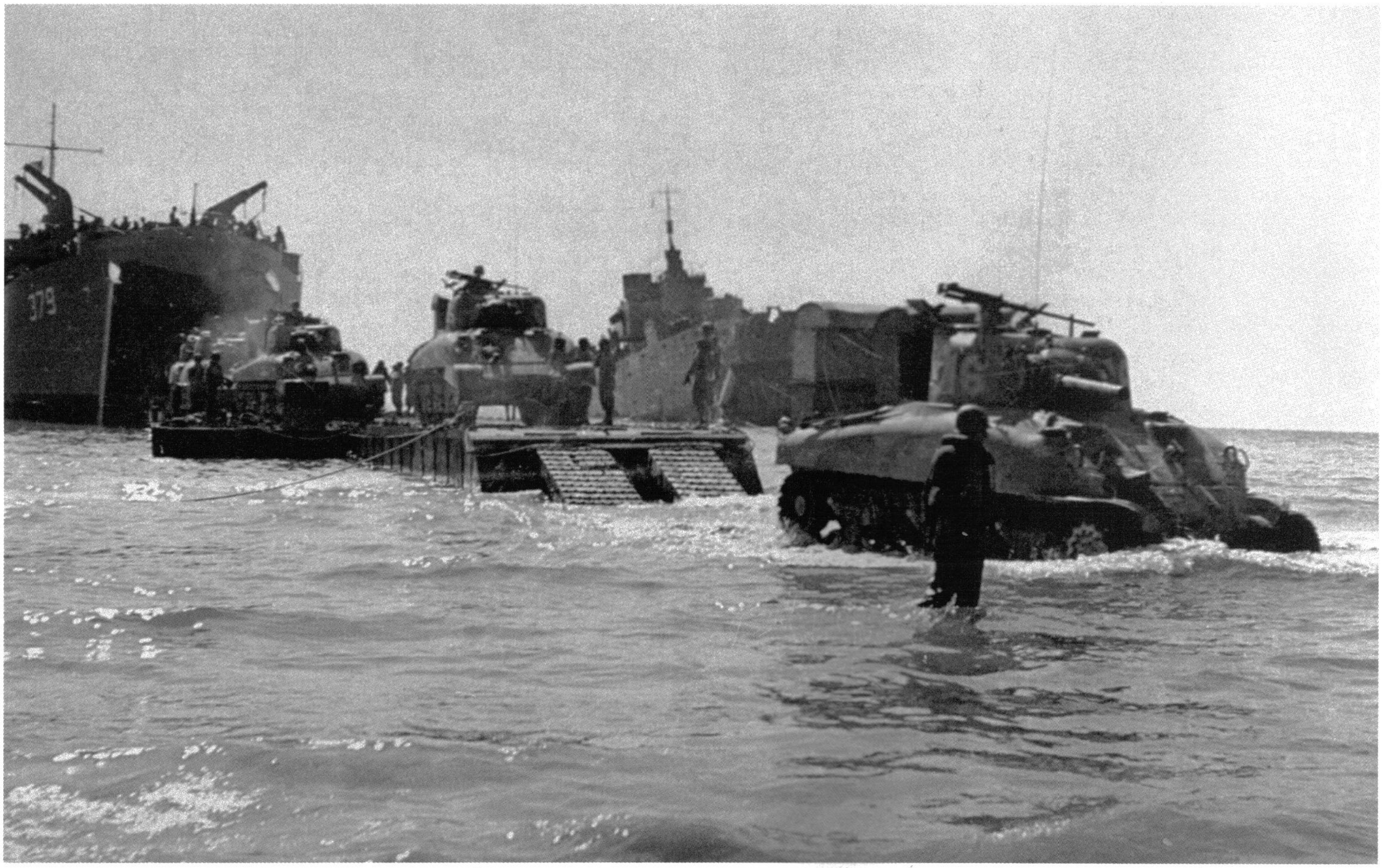
North Africa served as a staging area for US Army operations in the Mediterranean. Here, an ordnance unit is examining a Scorpion flail tank provided by the British 8th Army. The British army had undertaken development of flail tanks for rapid breaching of mine-fields and had first used them in North Africa.



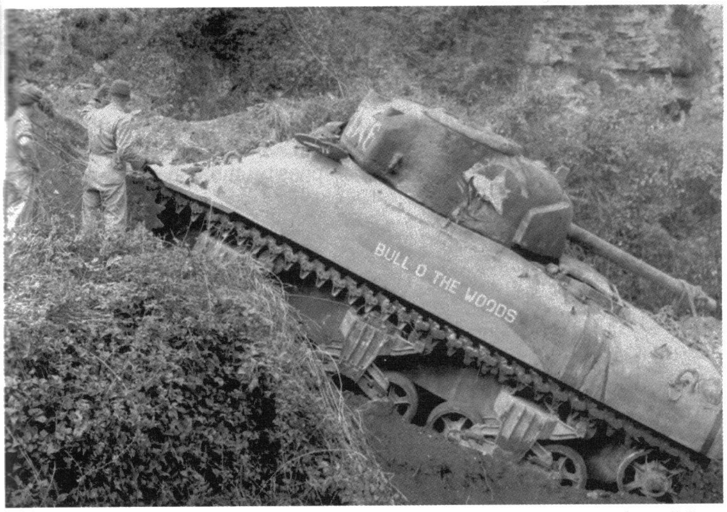
For Operation "Husky", the amphibious assault on Sicily, the 2nd Armored Division provided the armored shock force of Patton's Seventh Army. Here, a M4A1 moves down a street in Gela on 11 July 1943, site of one of the American landings. Tank fighting on Sicily was limited in scope, in no small measure due to the inept leadership of the Herman Göring Panzer Division.



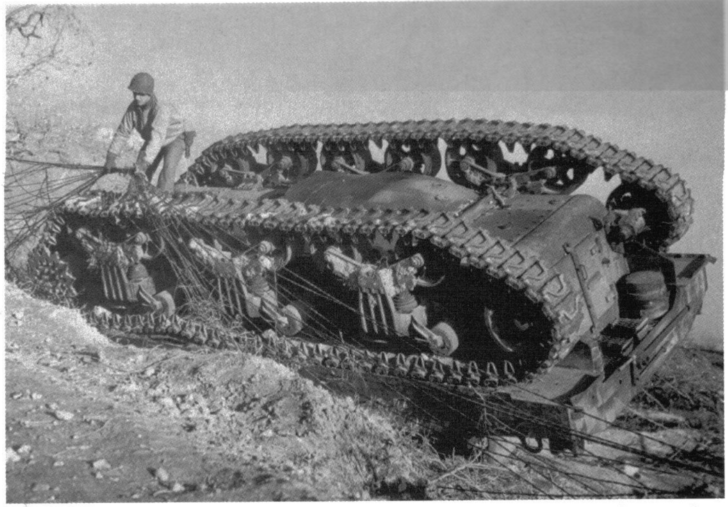
A 2nd Armored Division M4 on an overpass near Mistretta, Sicily on 14 August 1943, three weeks after the area had been captured. Sicily saw the first use of the "Allied star" insignia, a white star in a white circle, introduced after North Africa to prevent the star from being mistaken for a German cross at a distance.



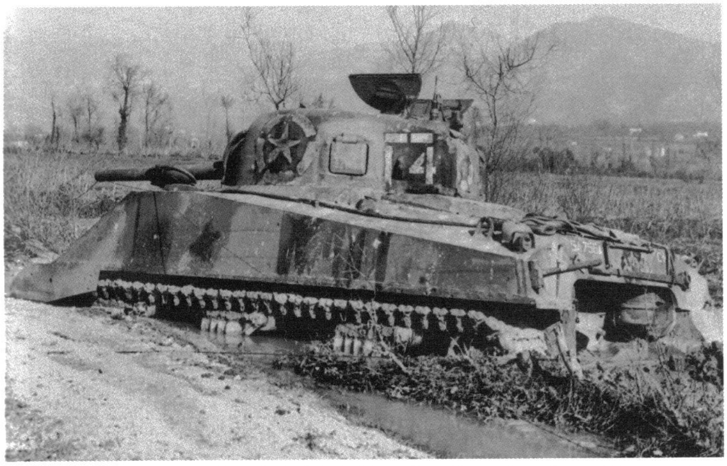
The Sicily landings were followed by landings in Italy proper with the assault at Salerno on 9 September 1943. Armored support in the American sector was provided by the 751st Tank Battalion and the 191st Tank Battalion. The water off the Paestum beach was too shallow for LSTs, forcing the navy to deploy pontoon ramps to get the tanks ashore like these M4A1 tanks.



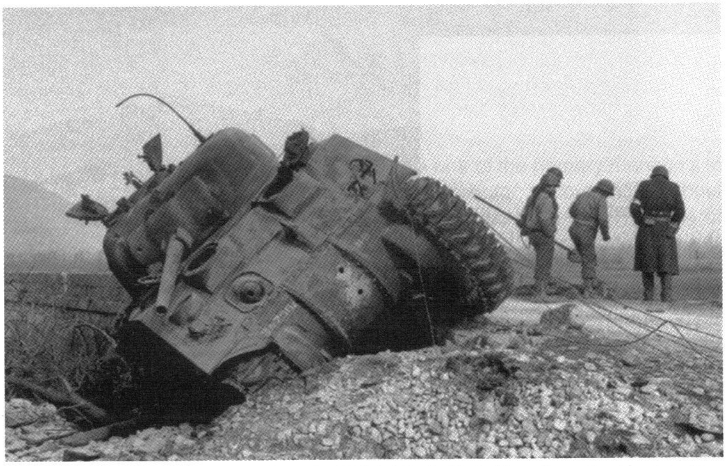
This M4A1 named "Bull O' The Woods" is being recovered after sliding off a road. It is camouflage painted in the earth yellow/olive drab scheme established for the Sicily landings. The tank carries its tactical number, "1*6" on the turret rear separated by the star, a pattern common in Fifth Army tank units.



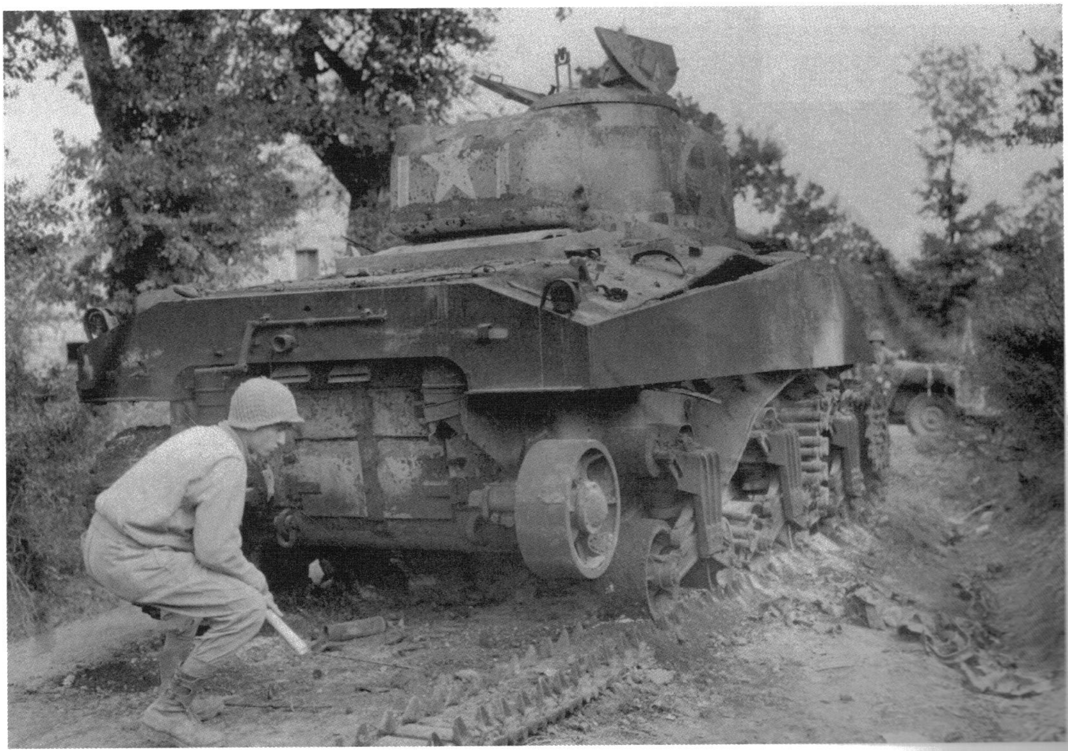
Fighting in Italy in early 1944 focused around the German Gustav line defenses near Cassino. Here a signals lineman attempts to clean up telephone lines that have been draped on an overturned M4 medium tank knocked out in the fighting near Cassino in January 1944.



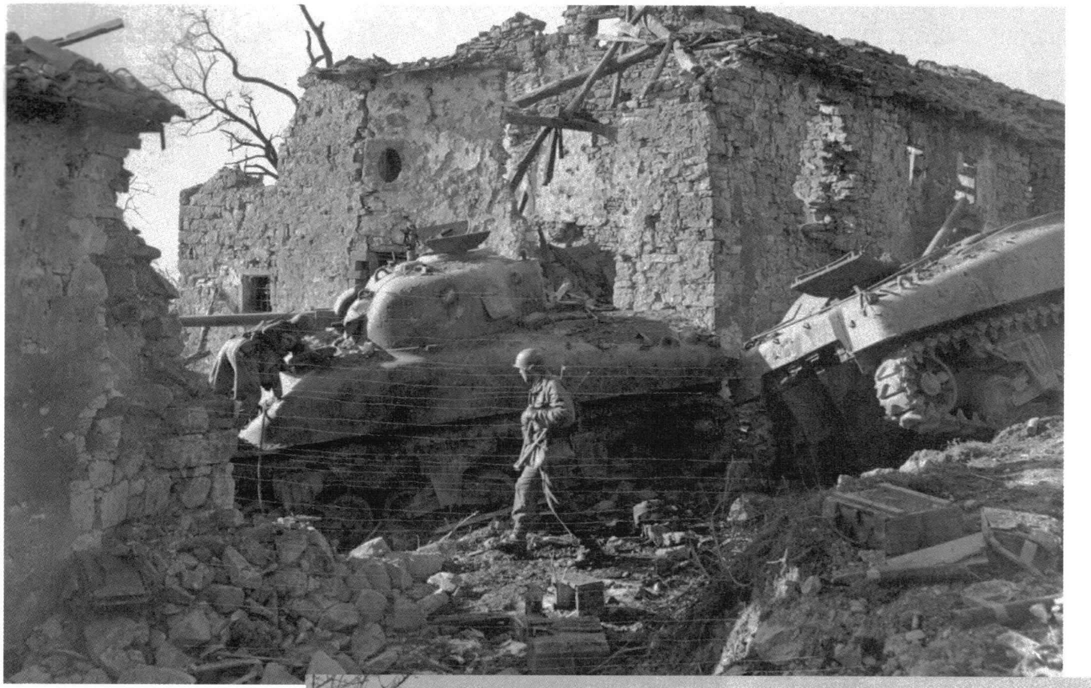
A M4 from Co. C, 756th Tank Battalion lies abandoned in a water-logged ditch during the fighting along the Rapido river on 8 February 1944. This unit proved valuable in providing close-support for infantry units during the late January fighting on the approaches to Cassino.



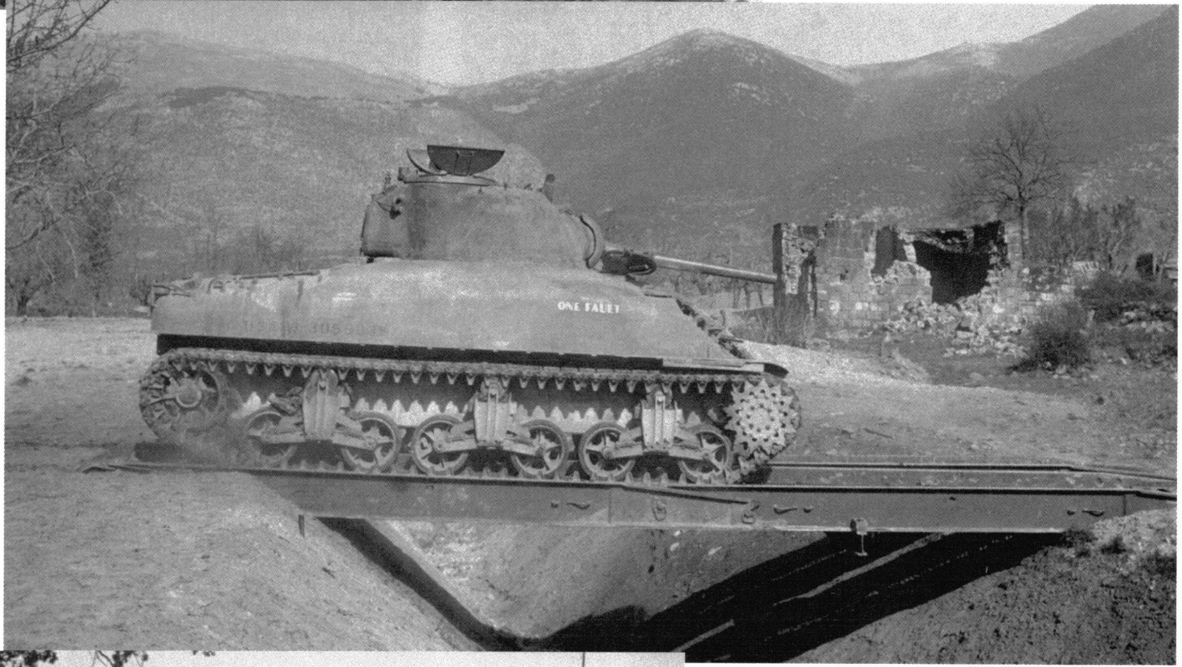
A M4 tank, "B-9" from Co. B, 756th Tank Battalion, knocked out in the approaches to Cassino by two direct hits on the transmission housing in early February 1944. Engineers are checking the bridge abutment for mines.



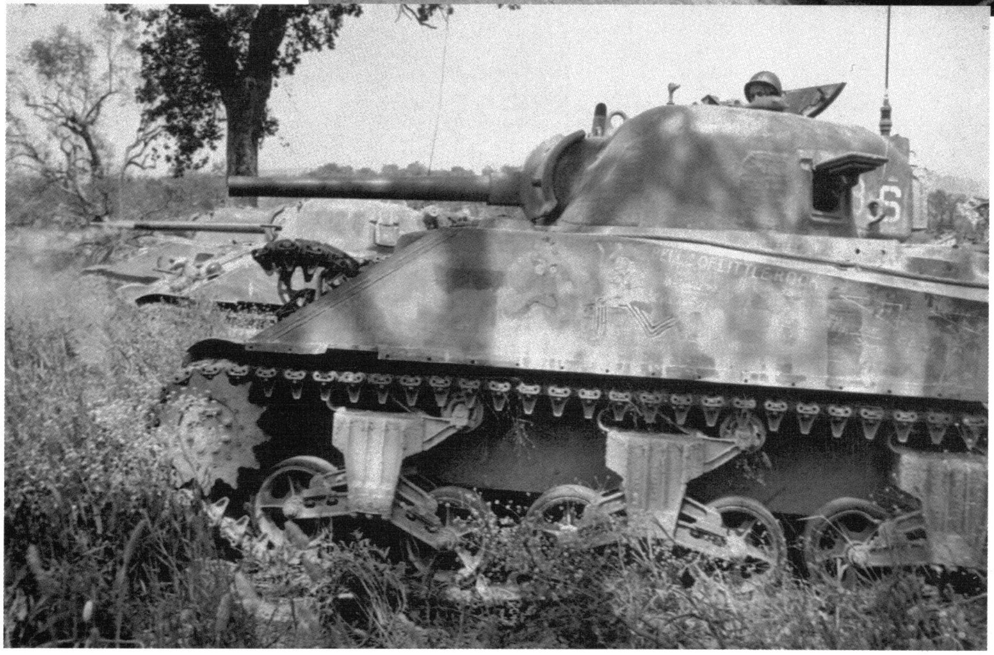
This M4 has suffered an internal ammunition fire which has burned it out completely and blown the lower sponson panel downward on to the tracks. An engineer is attempting to reattach the tracks so that the tank can be cleared from the road.



A pair of M4A1 tanks knocked out while supporting the French Expeditionary Corps' attack on Monte Belvedere in late January 1944. Here, some troops from the US Army 10th Mountain Division explore the wrecks while passing through on 20 February 1944.

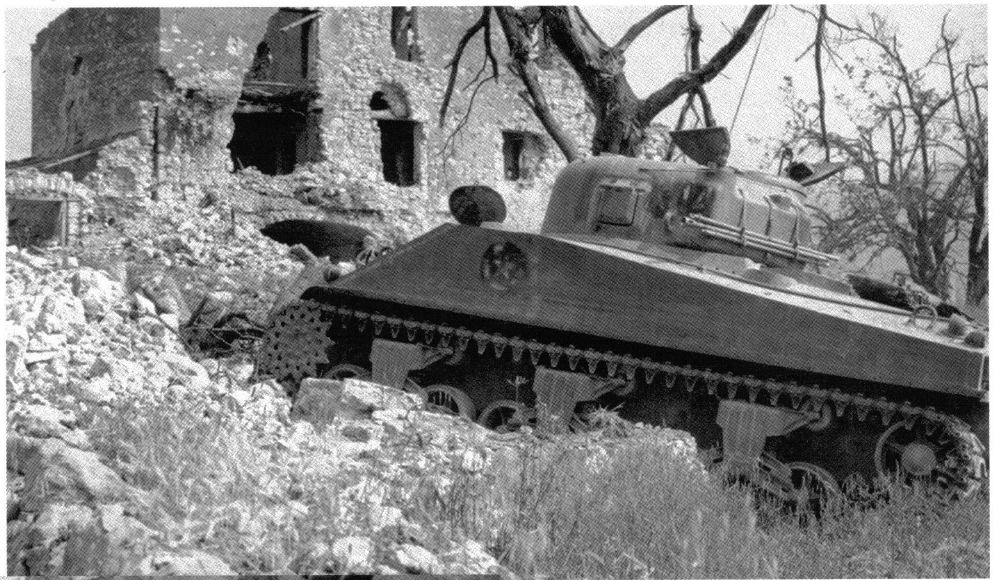


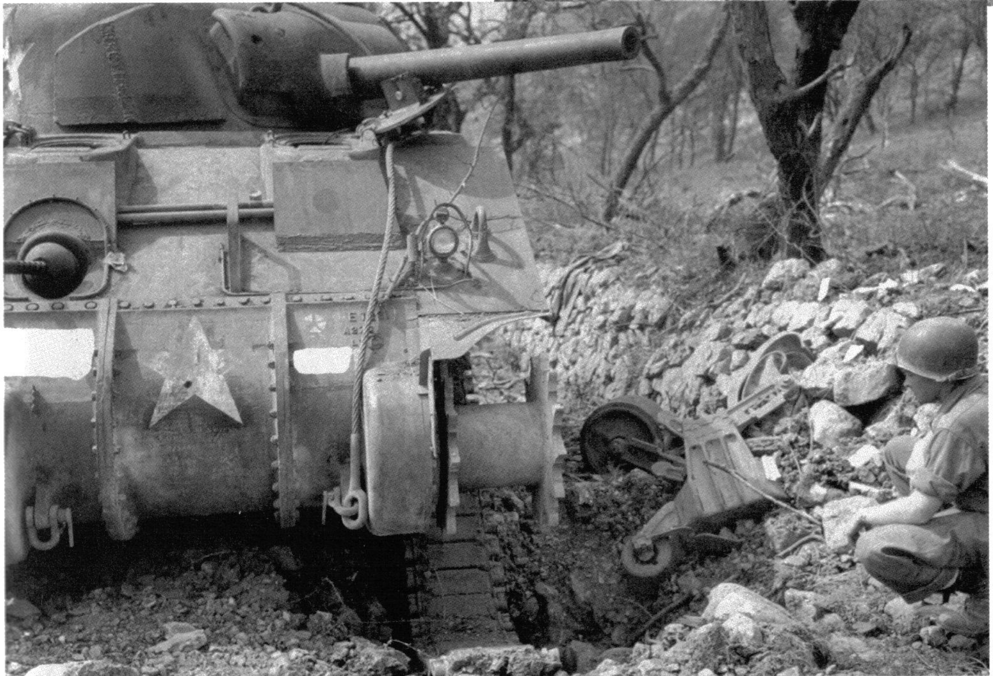
Operations in the mountainous Italian conditions convinced the US Army of the need for more engineer support of tank units. Here, the 16th Engineer Battalion conducts trials of a treadway bridge for crossing anti-tank ditches and other obstructions, using a M4A1 medium tank named "One Fault".



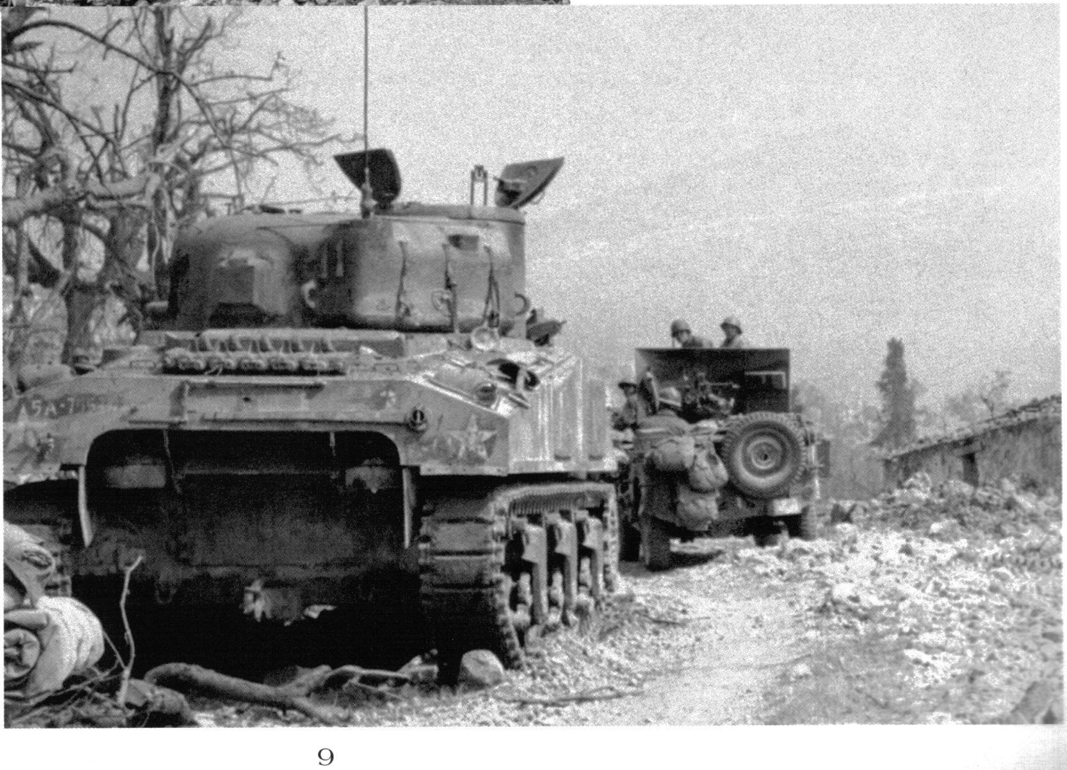
After months of frustration and stalemate, in May 1944, the US Fifth Army began a major offensive against the Gustav line in conjunction with the neighboring British Eight Army. The 88th Infantry Division struck from Castelforte, supported by M4 tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion. The tank in the foreground has a barely legible cartoon painted on the side, "Belle of Little Rock".

This M4 of the 760th Tank Battalion took part in the fighting on Monte SS Cosma e'Damiano on 13 May 1944 during the 88th Infantry Division attack. By this stage of the campaign, the tanks were painting out the Allied recognition star as it presented too clear a target for German anti-tank gunners.

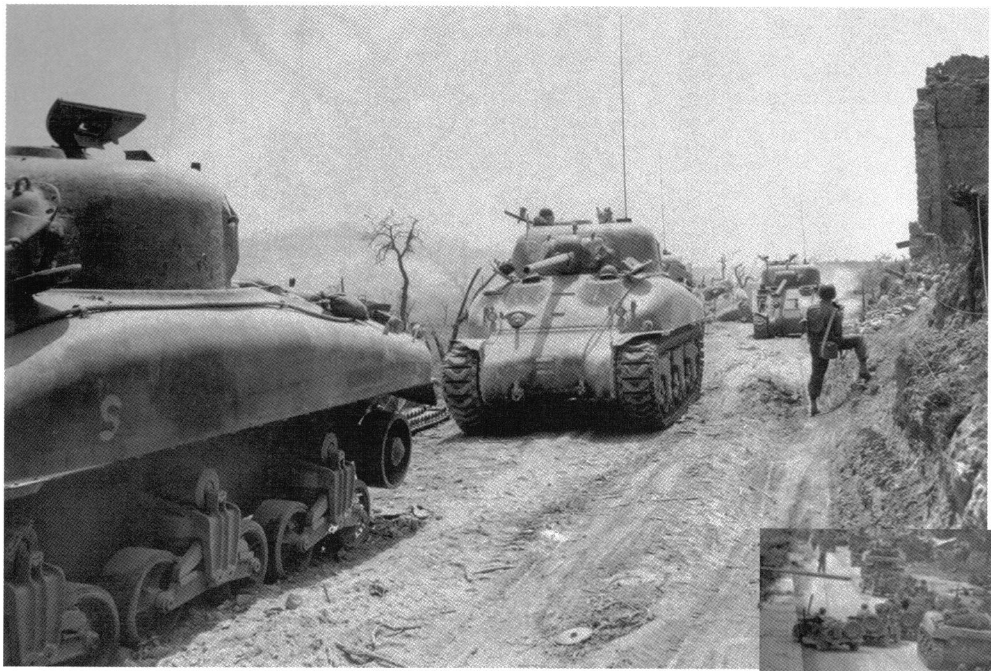




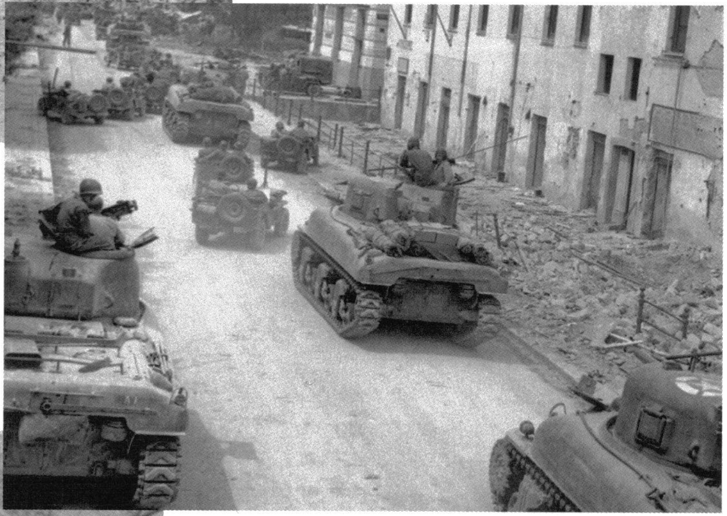
Mines were one of the primary menace's to tanks in the Italian theater, accounting for about a quarter of all tank losses in Italy. This M4 of the 755th Tank Battalion near Castelforte has had its lead bogie assembly completely blown off. This is one of the newer M4 tanks, with additional applique armor added in front of the driver's stations and on the right side of the turret front.



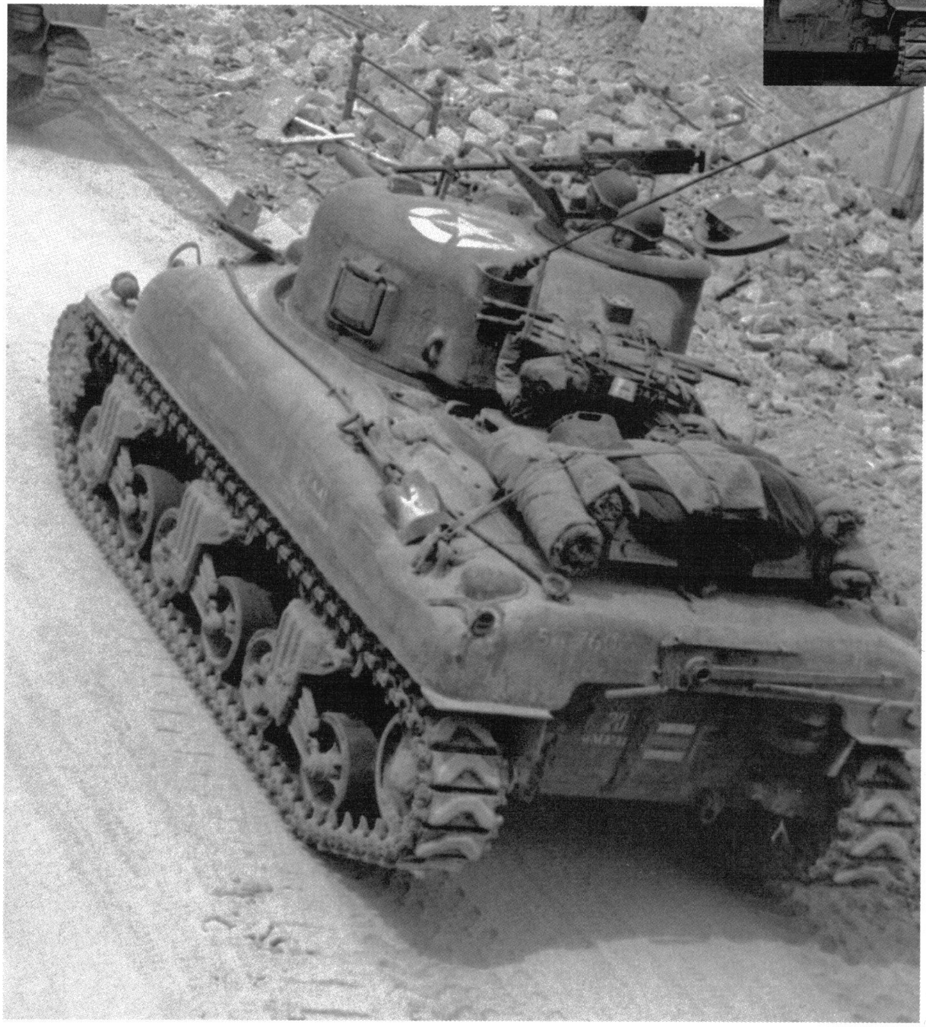
To the right of the American assault, Gen. Juin's French Expeditionary Force launched an attack on the German 71st Infantry Division in the Monte Majo area. Here, on 13 May 1944, a French M6 37mm gun motor carriage and jeep pass by a M4 medium tank of the 755th Tank Battalion knocked out earlier in the fighting.



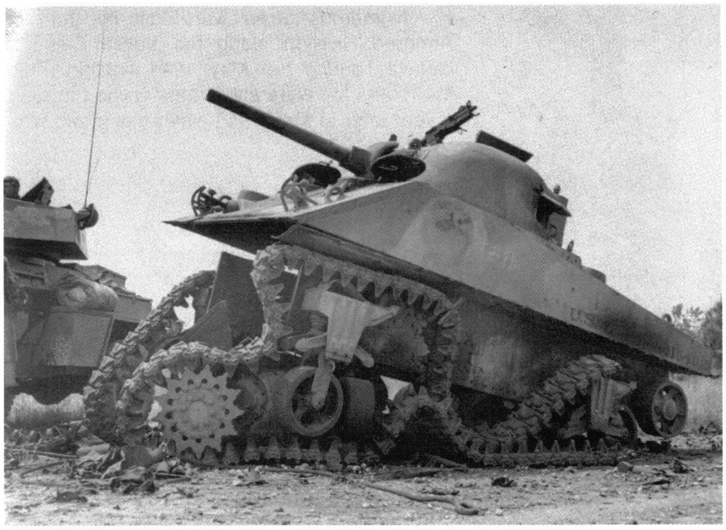
Following the penetration and collapse of the Gustav line in mid-May 1944 and the capture of Monte Cassino, the Allied forces next moved on to the so-called Hitler line in the approaches to Rome. Among the most formidable defenses in the Hitler line were Panther tank turrets emplaced as fixed defenses covering key road junctions. M4A1 tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion move past a tank knocked out in fighting earlier on 14 May 1944 along the Minturno-Santa Maria Infante road while supporting the attack by the 351st Infantry Regiment. The M4A1 to the left is probably one of the tanks of Co. C led by Lt. Gleisner that were knocked out on the morning of 12 May 1944 to Teller mines.



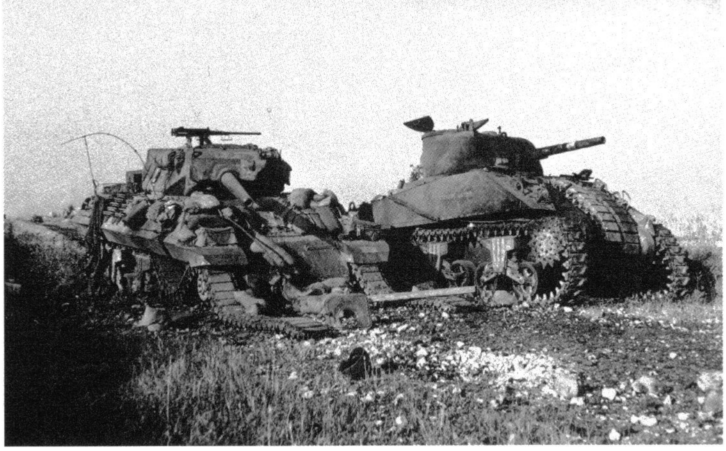
During the fighting in the Mt. Bracchi hills, the 760th Tank Battalion supported the 351st Infantry in the capture of Formia on 14 May 1944. This is a view of M4A1 tanks of Co. A and B, 760th Tank Battalion line along the streets of Formia on 15 May 1944 after the town was captured.



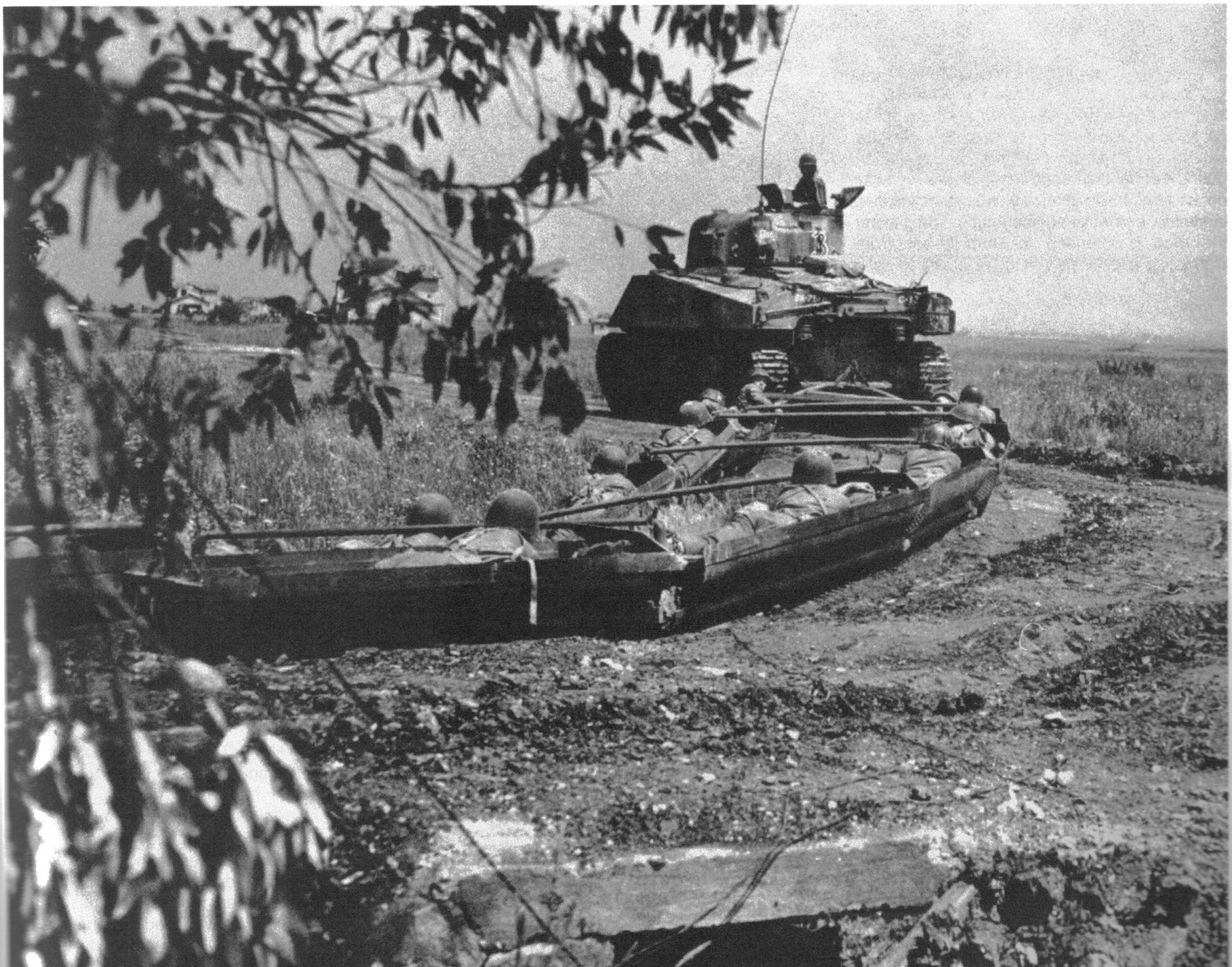
A close-up of one of the tanks of Co. B, 760th Tank Battalion in Formia. The shipping marking can be seen on the engine doors, a common form of unit marking in the Italian theater.



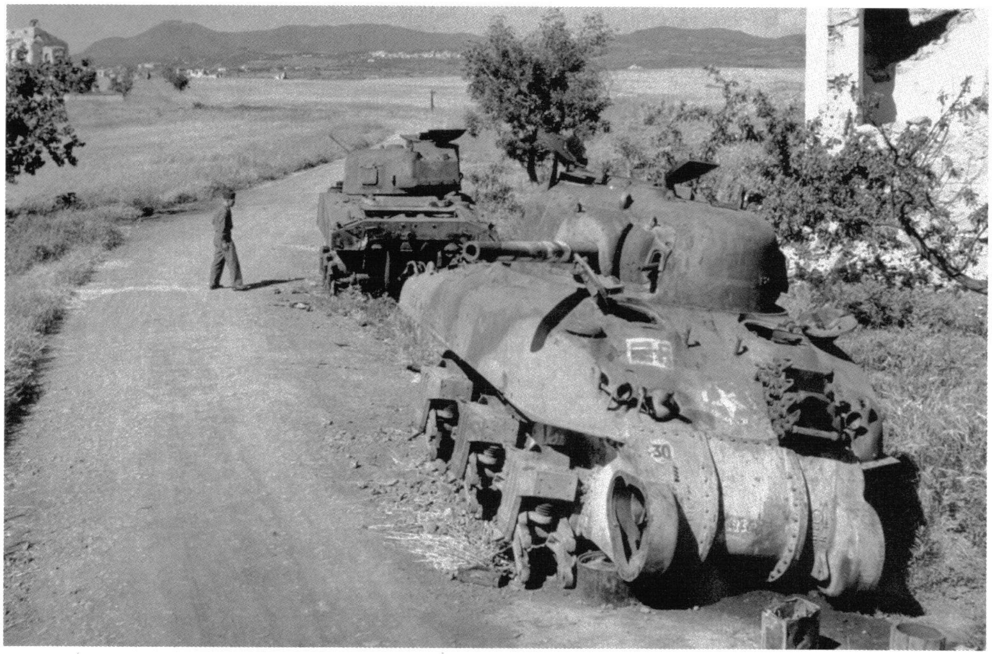
Mine's could set off internal ammunition stowage with horrific results as shown by this M4 blown open during fighting near Borgo Sabotino on 23 May 1944.



In hopes of circumventing the stalemate along the Gustav line, in January 1944 the US VI Corps landed at Anzio, south of Rome. Instead of relieving the Allied forces, the Anzio force became trapped in the lodgement until May 1944. With the renewal of the Allied offensive against Cassino in May 1944, the forces at Anzio prepared to break-out for Rome, codenamed "Operation Buffalo". Leading the attack was the 1st Armored Division. This is an M10 tank destroyer of the division's 710th Tank Destroyer Bn. knocked out alongside a M4 tank named "Fighting Gator" during the savage fighting along the Cisterna road on 22 May 1944.

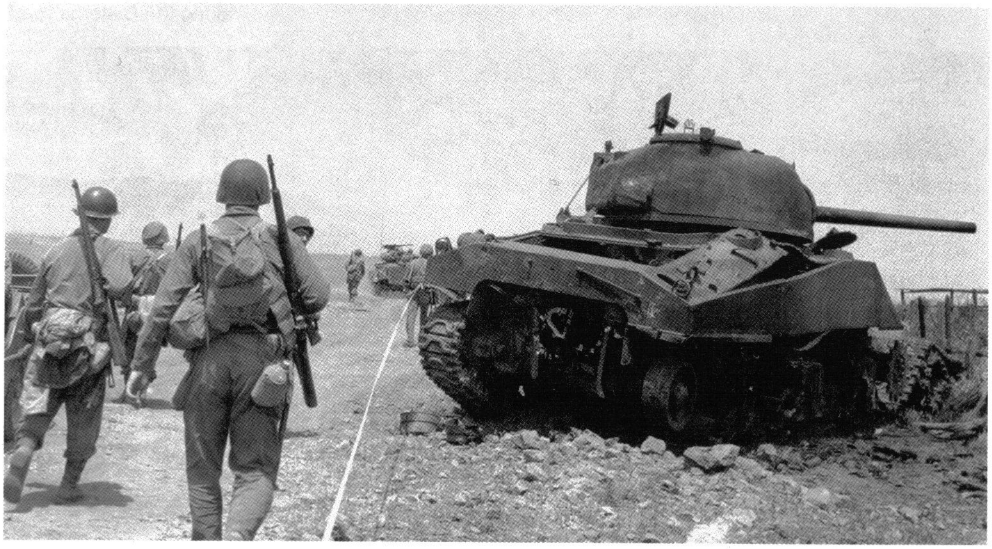


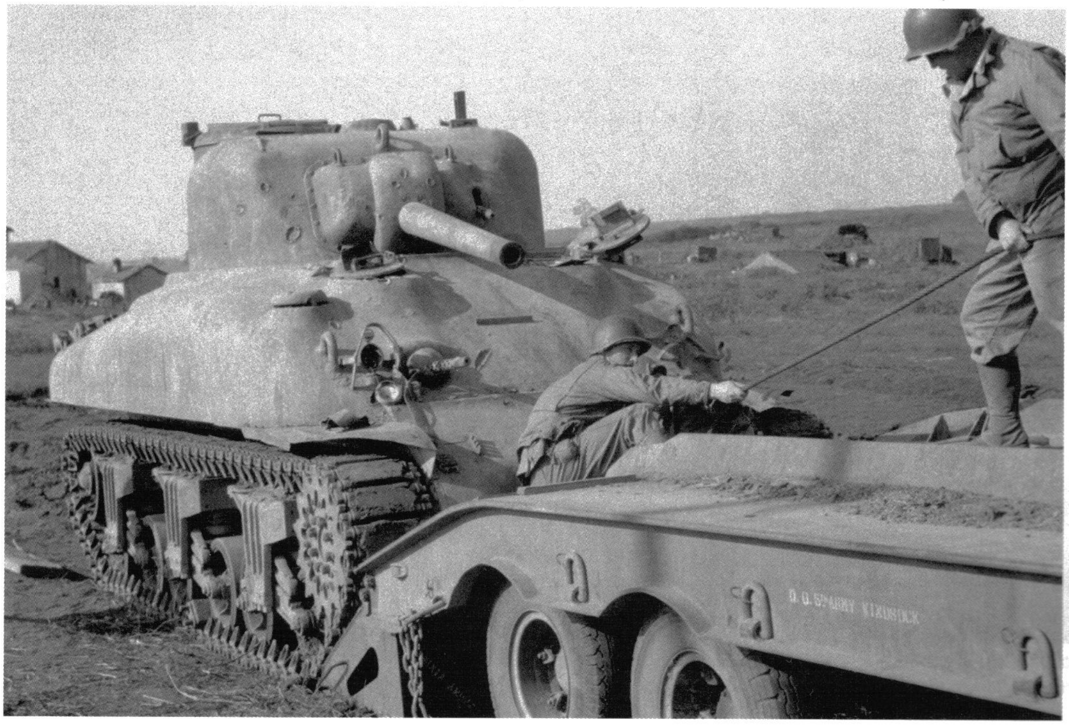
One of the more novel concepts attempted in the Anzio break-out was the "Battle Sled" idea pioneered by the commander of the 3rd Division, Gen. J.W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel. These metal sleds were designed to be towed behind tanks to attack heavily protected objectives. This is a training exercise on 10 June 1944.



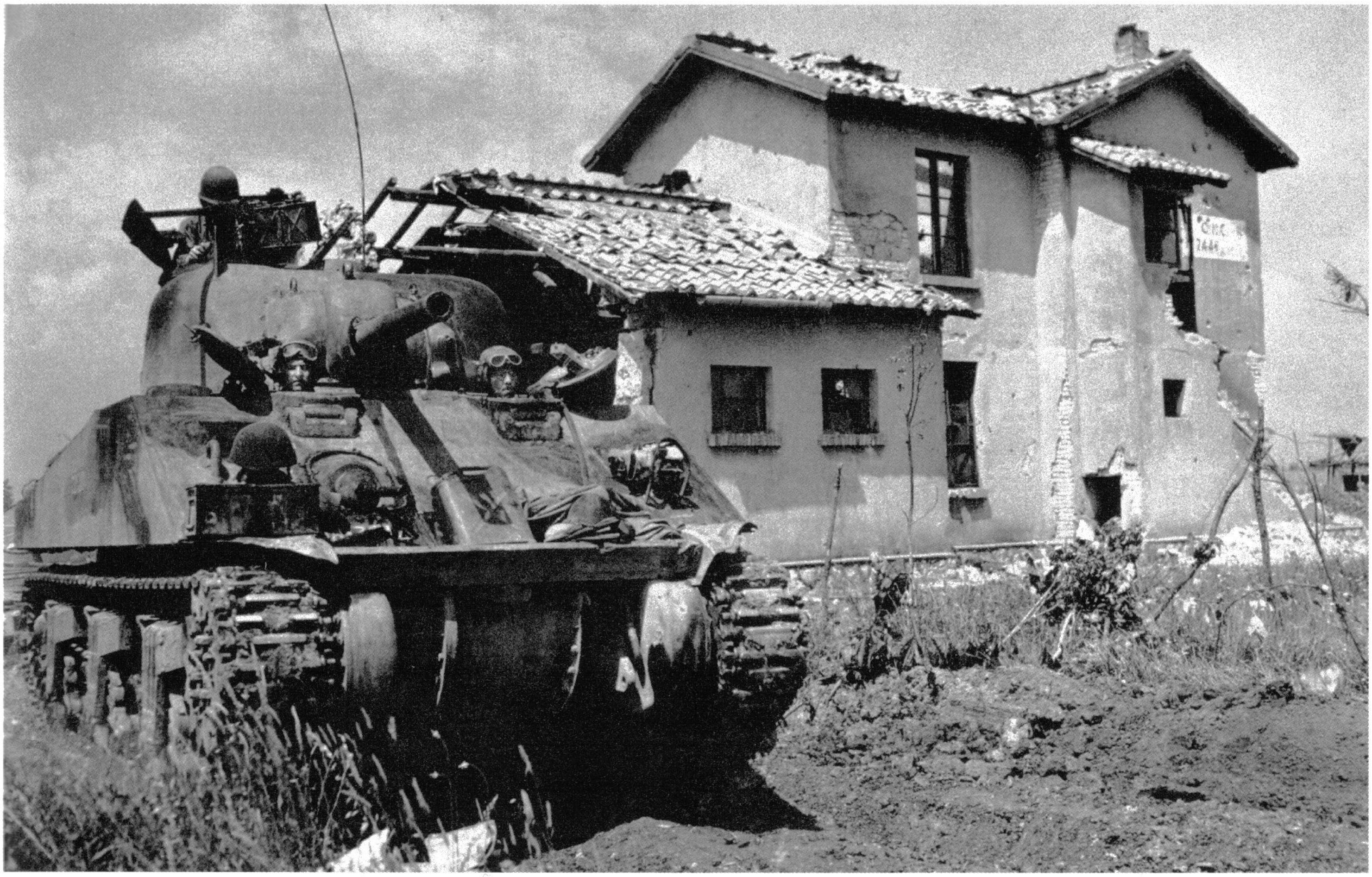
Numerous tanks were lost by the 1st Armored Division along the Velletri-Cisterna highway during the May 1944 fighting. This M4A1 and M4 were still left alongside the road a year later in May 1945 when this photo was taken.

GIs from the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment pass by a destroyed M4 tank of the 1st Armored Division that has suffered from a catastrophic internal ammunition explosion during the fighting along the Cisterna highway on 22 May 1944. The tank was a victim of a landmine, and white engineer tape strung along the road is intended to keep troops from wandering into the minefield.

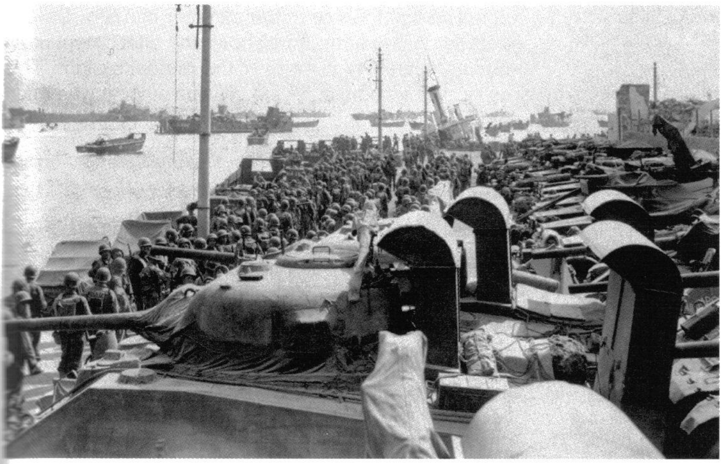




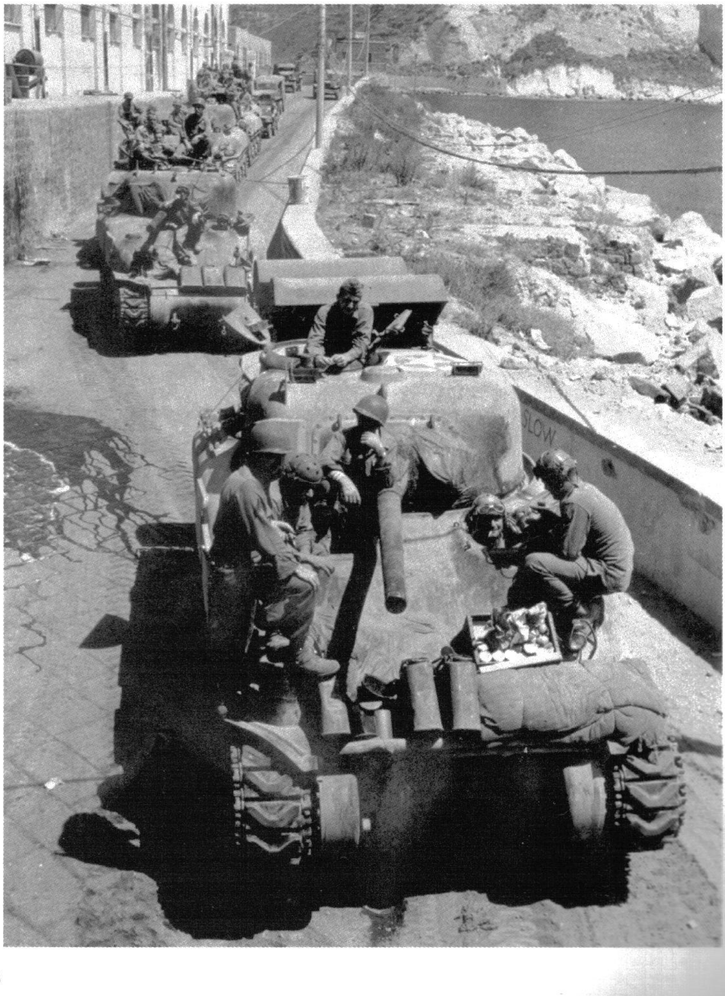
This M4A1 of the 1st Armored Division is winched on to a tank-transporter after being knocked out during "Operation Buffalo". The turret is pock-marked with many small caliber hits which have failed to penetrate the armor. As will be noticed, the 1st Armored Division was still operating many early production M4A1 tanks at this time without the added glacis, hull or turret applique armor.



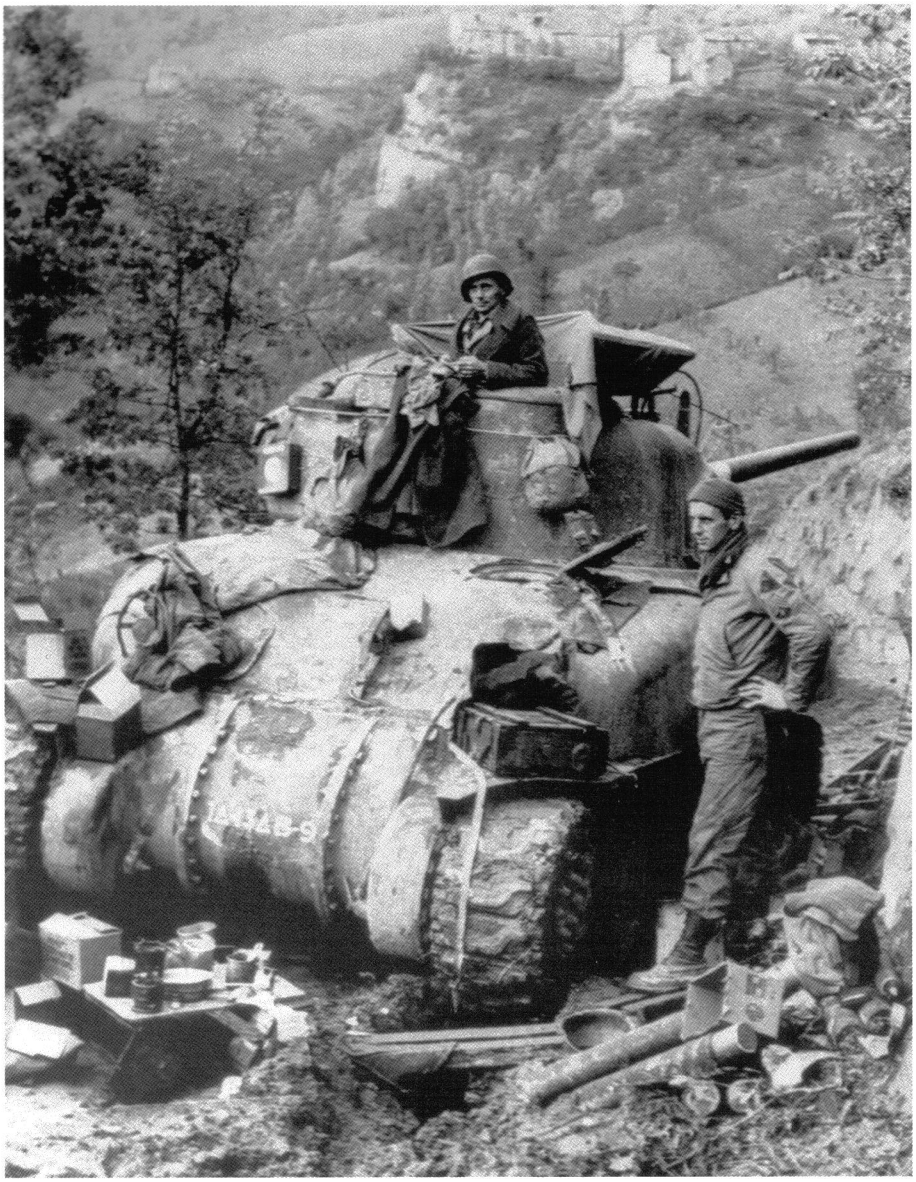
Rome finally fell to the Allies on 4 June 1944, and the pursuit of the Germans soon followed. This is a M4 operating north of the city on 10 June 1944. This is an early production M4 with the hinged driver's view slits.

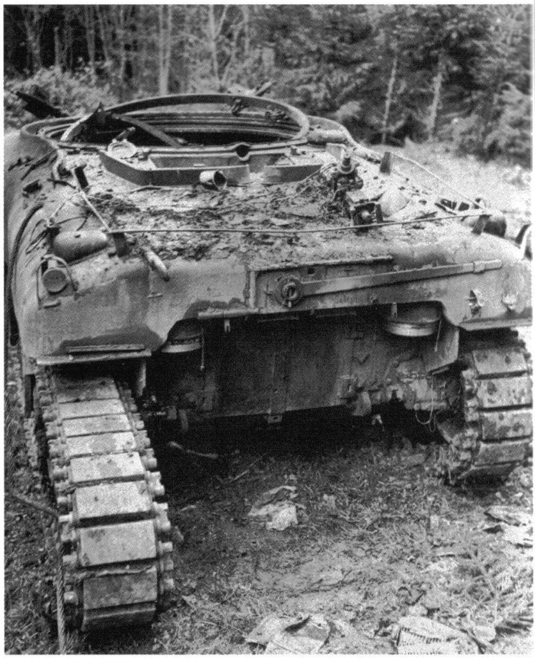


No sooner had the Fifth Army captured Rome, but that significant portions of its forces were taken away to assist in the forthcoming operations in France. The Seventh Army began forming along the Italian coast to launch an amphibious invasion, codenamed Operation "Dragoon", against southern France. This is a harbor in Italy on 31 July 1944 with forces massing for the landing. The M4 tanks in the foreground have been prepared for the landing by being water-proofed and wading trunks added. Notice that the turret ring and other openings have been covered by combination of canvas and mastic sealant.



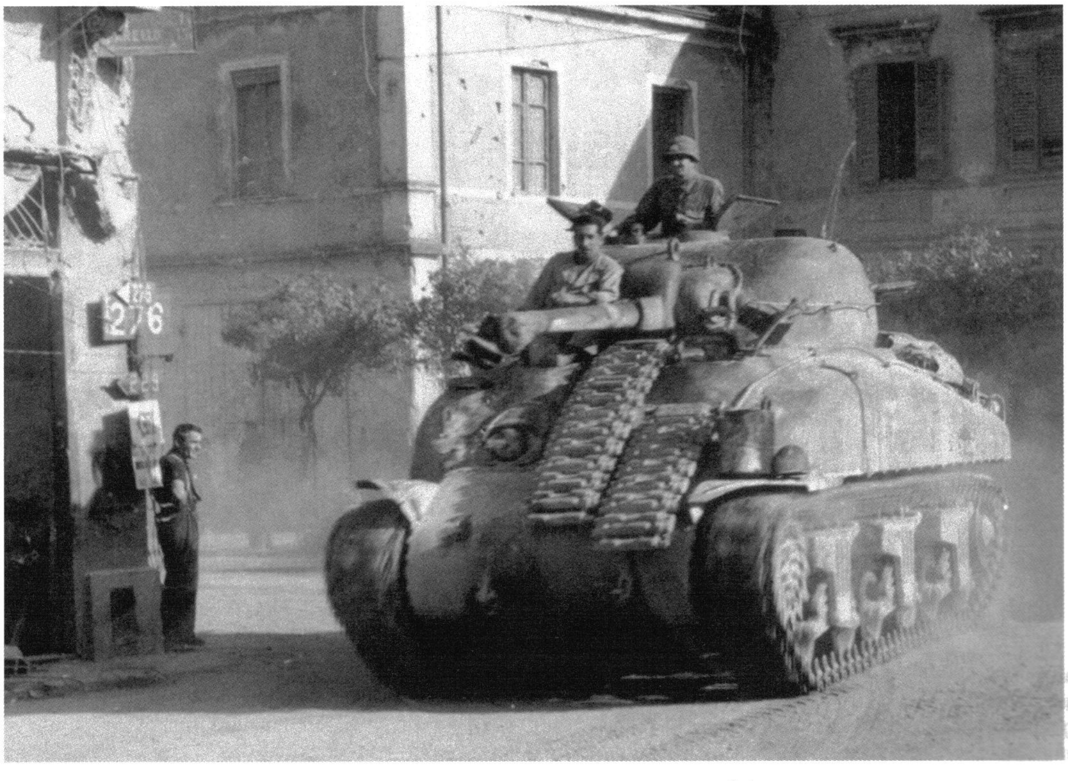
A column of M4A1 tanks move along the coast near Bagnoli, Italy on 10 August 1944 in preparations for the landings in southern France later in the week. The lead tank has its deep wading trunks fitted, and canvas and mastic sealant have been applied to the gun mantlet and turret ring.



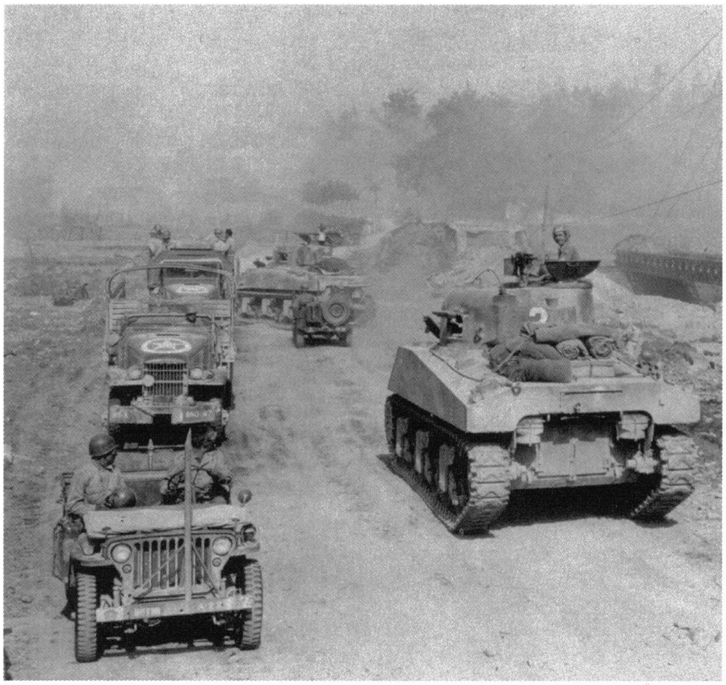


An M4A1 tank of the 1st Arm'd Regt., 1st Armored Division, knocked out by a hit from the rear that penetrated the center of the turret ring. The resulting ammunition fire has blown the turret off the tank.

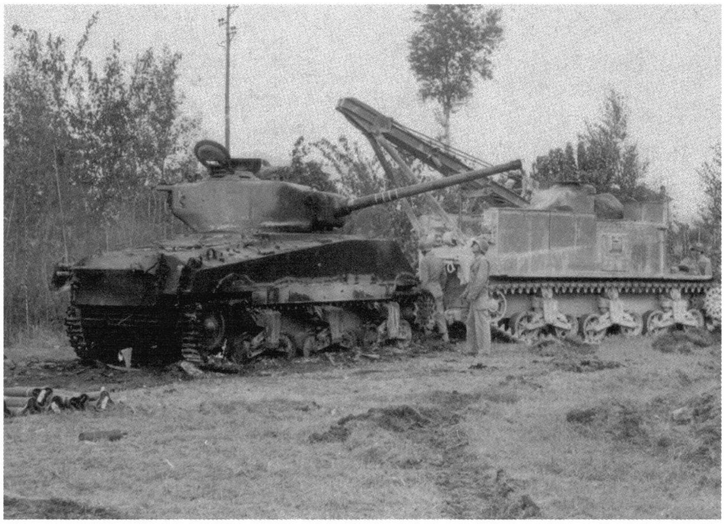
The 1st Armored Division remained in Italy with Fifth Army even though a number of the Fifth Army's separate tank battalions were transferred to Seventh Army in southern France. Here, the crew of a M4A1 of Co. B, 13th Arm'd. Regt. take a breather in the hill country north of Rome in the summer of 1944. Careful inspection of the turret front shows the attachment of an improvised artillery sight over the gunner's sight. This was relatively common in the division since it was often used to provide indirect artillery fire support. (Patton Museum)



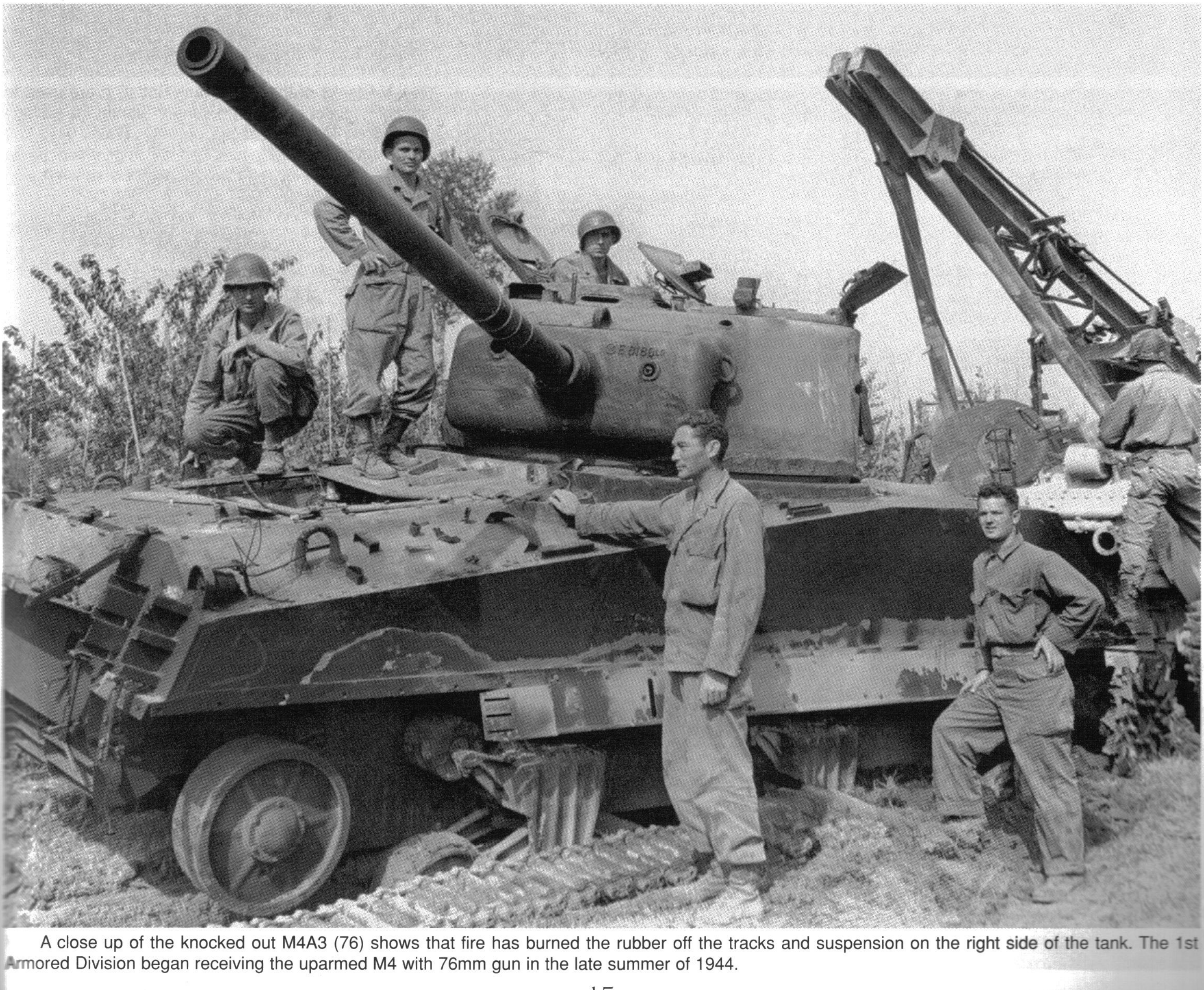
A M4A1 tank of 1st Armored Division moves through the town of Ponsacco on 1 September 1944 during the initial phases of the offensive against the Gothic line. Two strips of T49 metal grouser track have been attached to the glacis plate to provide a measure of added armor protection.



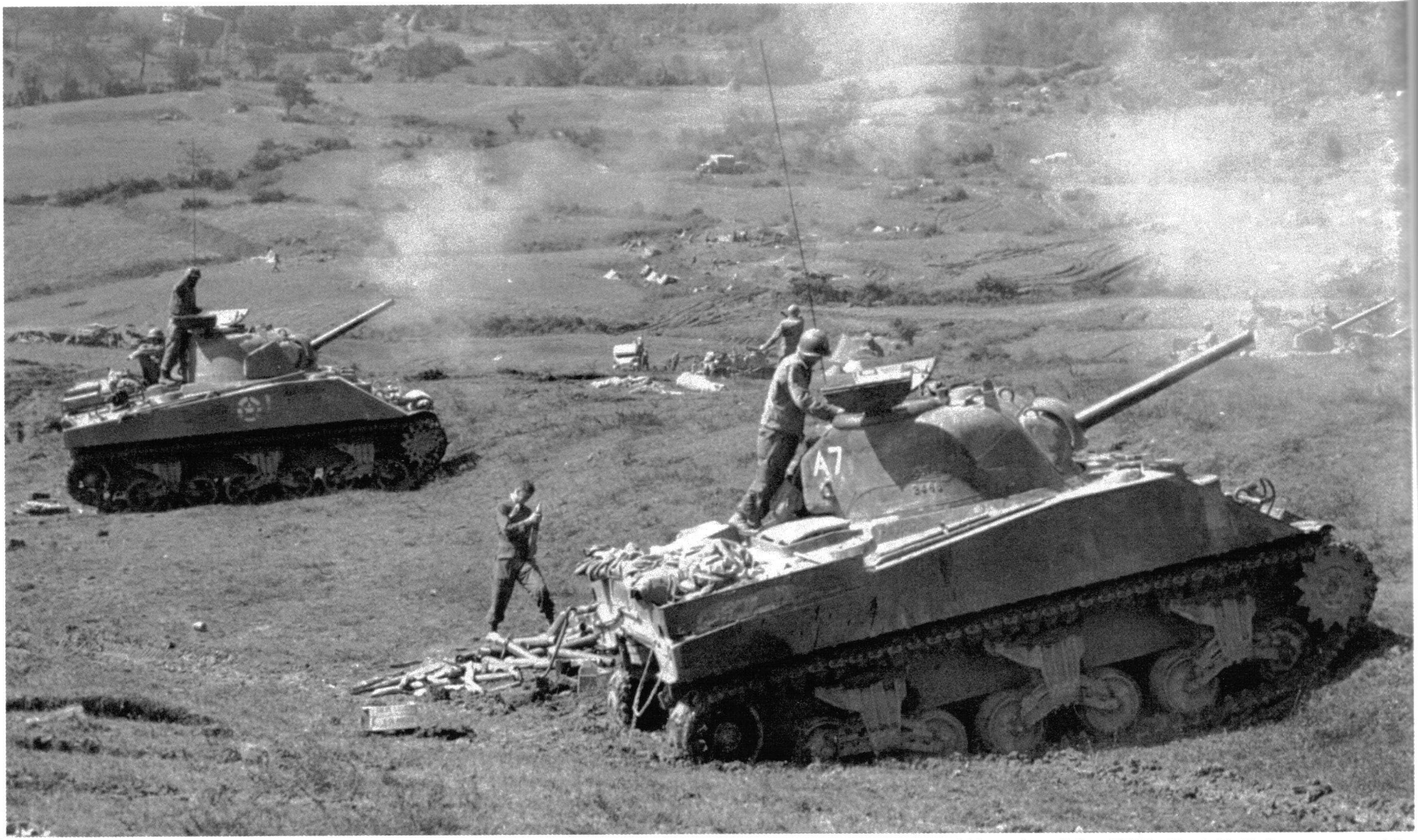
A M4 tank of the 752nd Tank Battalion passes a column of trucks and jeeps near San Piero on 13 September 1944, a day after the start of the II Corps offensive against the German Gothic Line north of Florence.



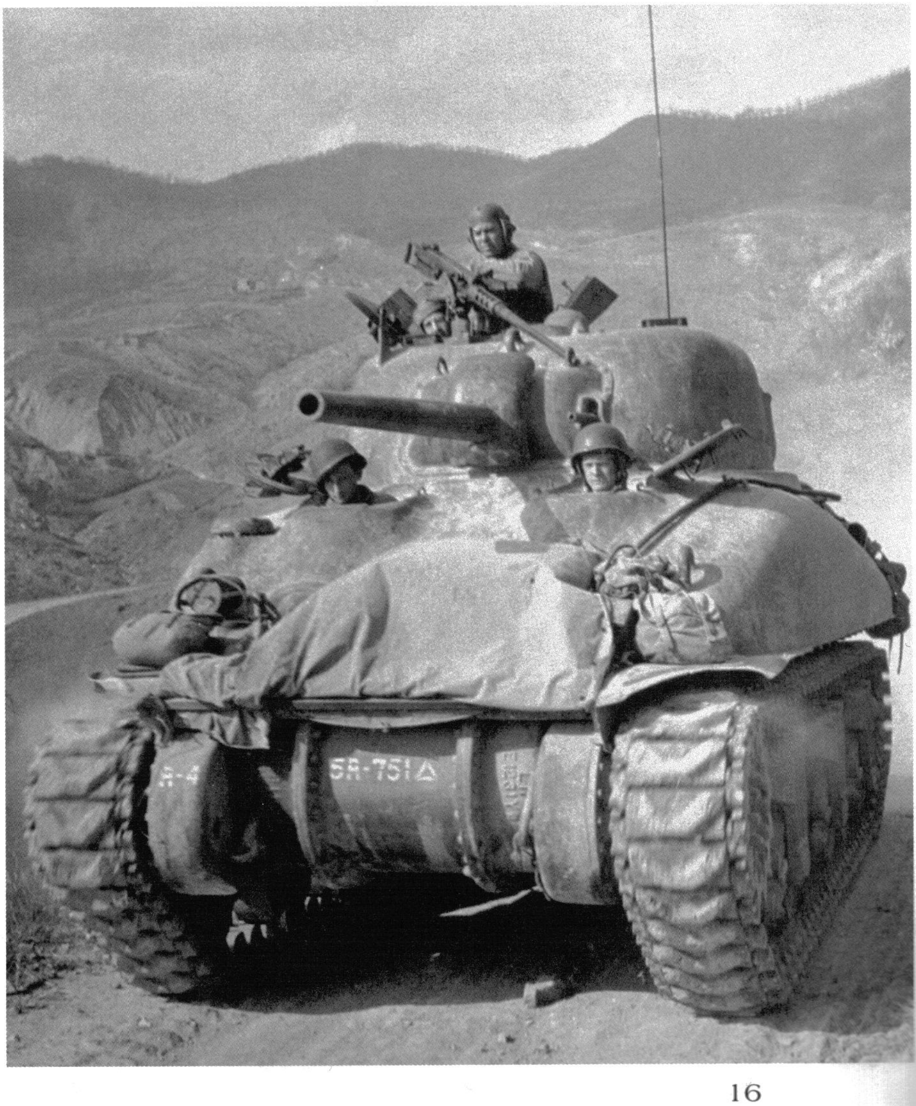
A T2 recovery vehicle prepares to recover a burned out M4A3 (76) hit by German artillery fire during the fighting along the Gothic Line. German artillery fire in the area was intense, including 28cm guns. The T2, later designated as the M31, was the standard US armored recovery vehicle during the war, and was based on the old M3 medium tank chassis.



A close up of the knocked out M4A3 (76) shows that fire has burned the rubber off the tracks and suspension on the right side of the tank. The 1st Armored Division began receiving the uparmed M4 with 76mm gun in the late summer of 1944.

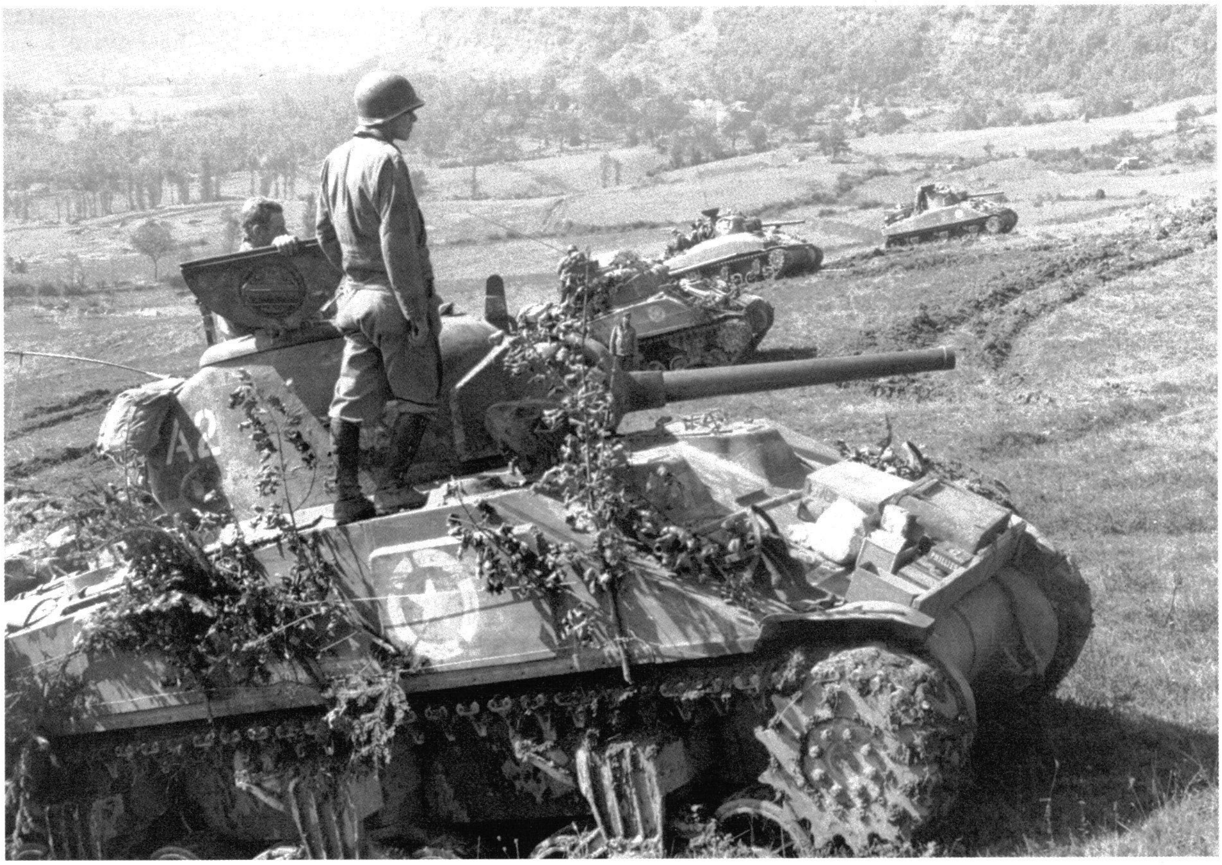


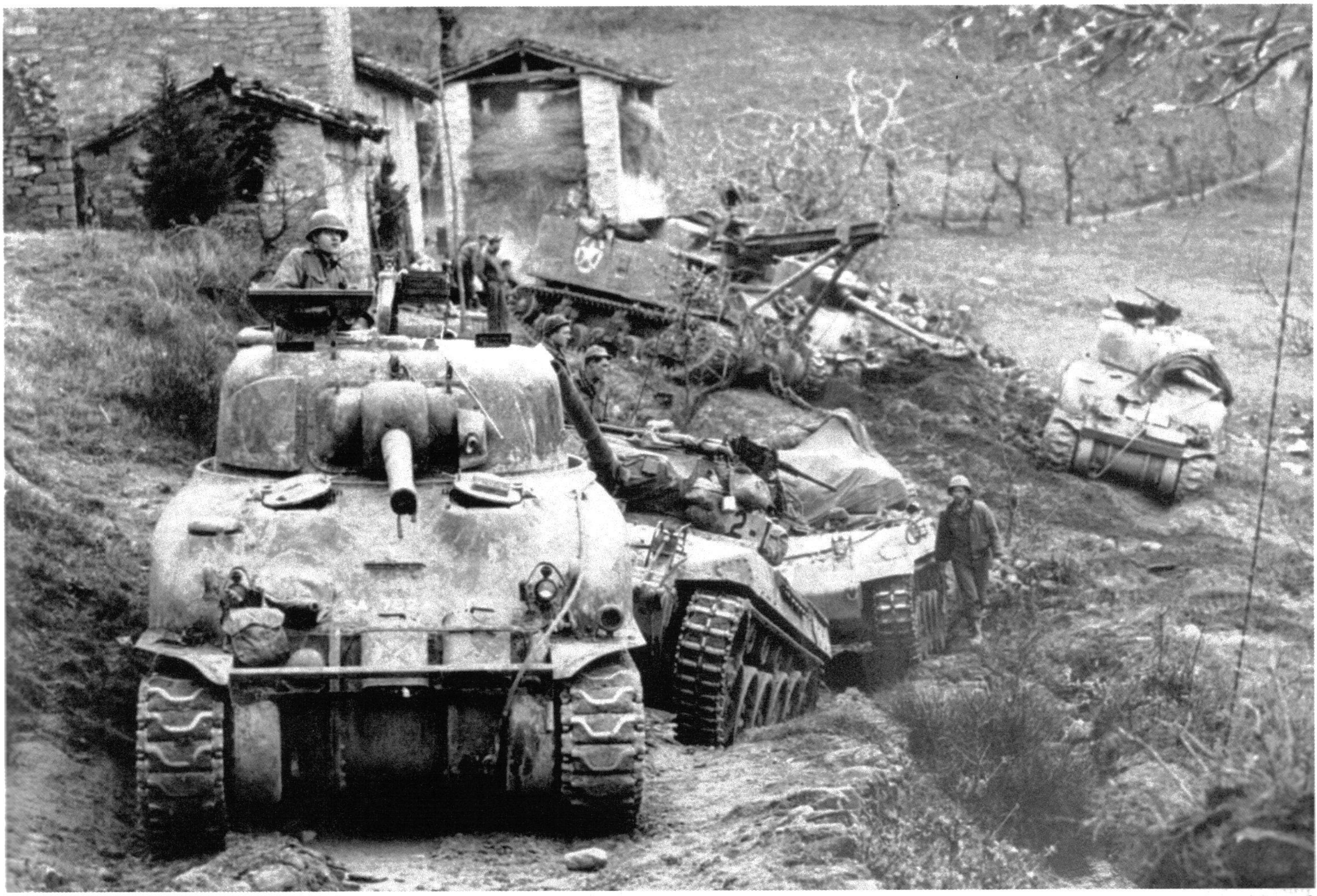
M4 tanks of the 755th Tank Battalion are used to provide indirect artillery fire support during the savage fighting on Monte Battaglia on 1 October 1944. The nearest vehicle, "A7", has had an improvised frame added to engine deck to help carry crew stowage and ammunition.



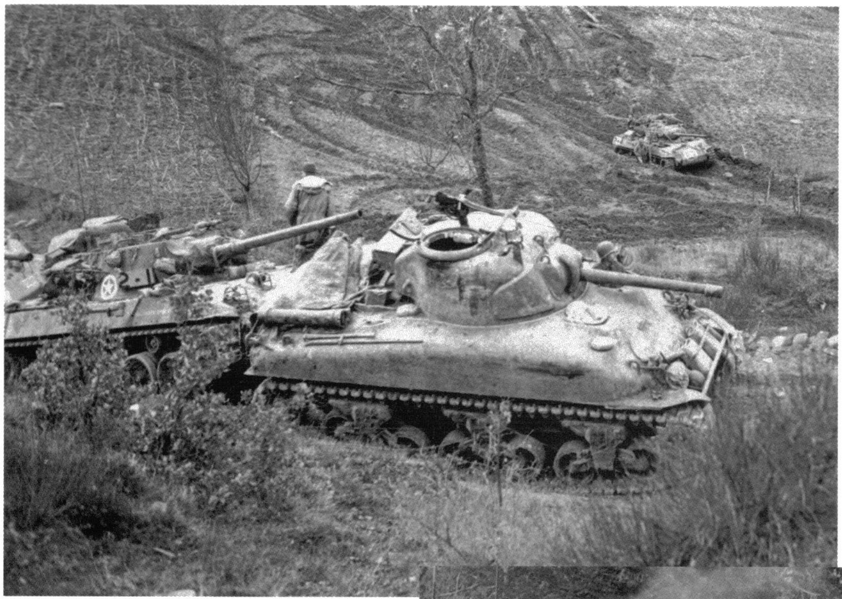
During mid-October, the 751st Tank Battalion supported Task Force 92's attack towards the Gothic line near Massa. This is a M4A1 from the unit's Co. A. This is from an early production batch with the early style of mantlet with no armored cheeks on the side of the gun tube.

A close-up view of "A2", one of the tanks of Co. A, 755th Tank Battalion while conducting fire support operations from the area near Pietramala on 1 October 1944. Wire has been tied along the hull side to attach natural foliage camouflage.

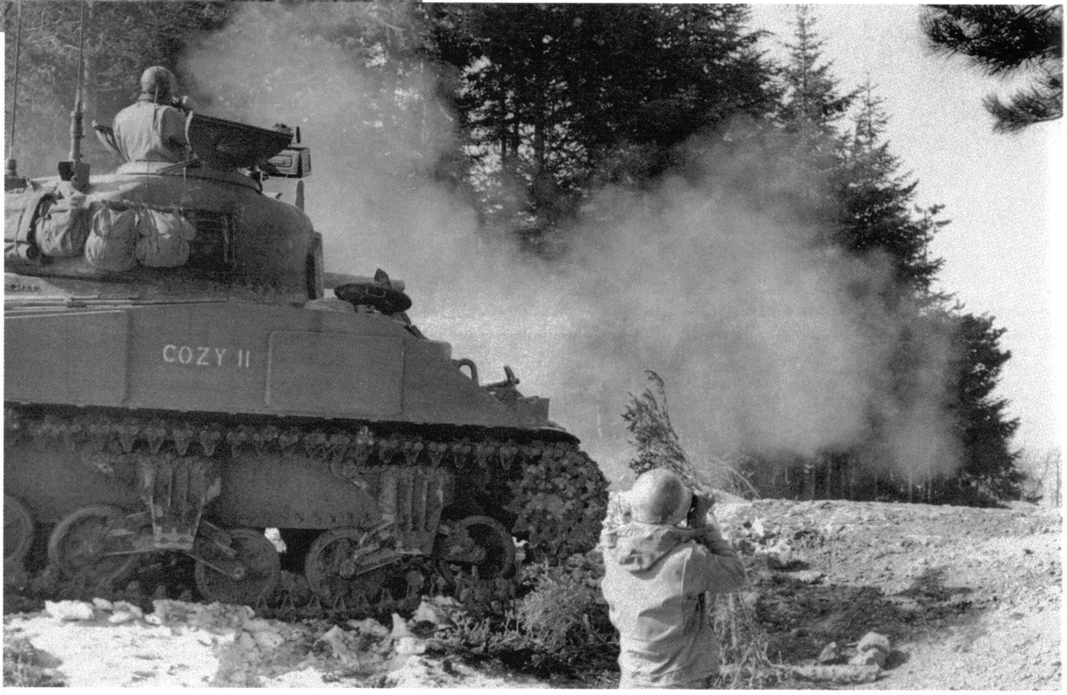




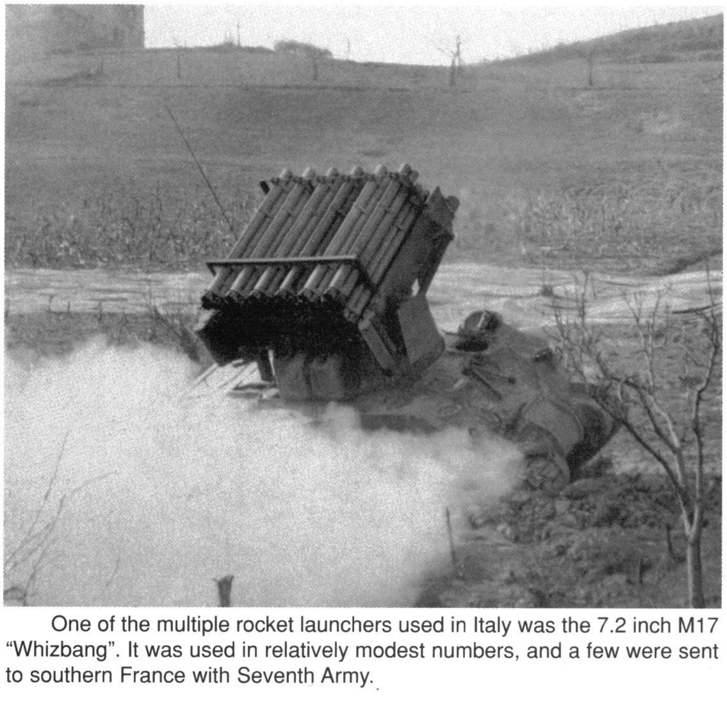
A M4A1 of the 752nd Tank Battalion gives an assist to a M18 76mm gun motor carriage of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion that has become bogged down on a hill on 11 December 1944. Behind these vehicles are a T2 armored recovery vehicle and a pair of M4 tanks, including one of the newer ones with 76mm gun.



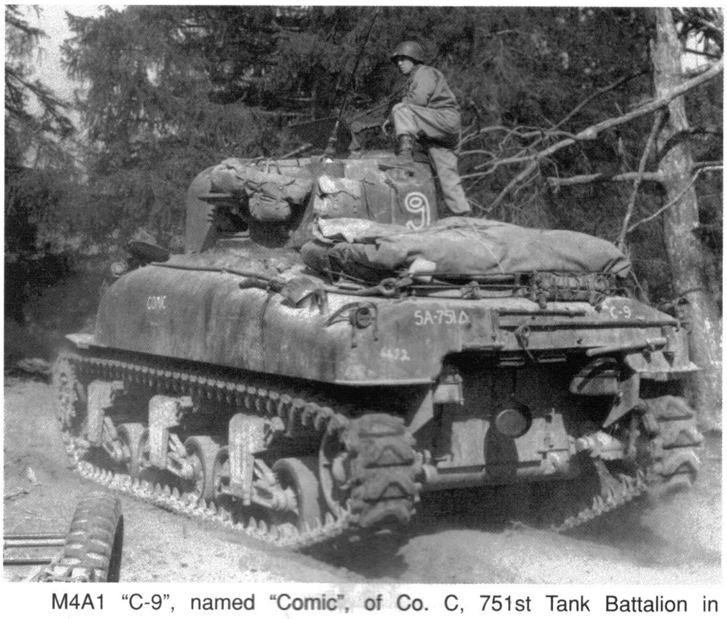
An overhead view of the M4A1 from 752nd Tank Battalio towing the M18. Another M18 can be seen bogged down in th field behind.



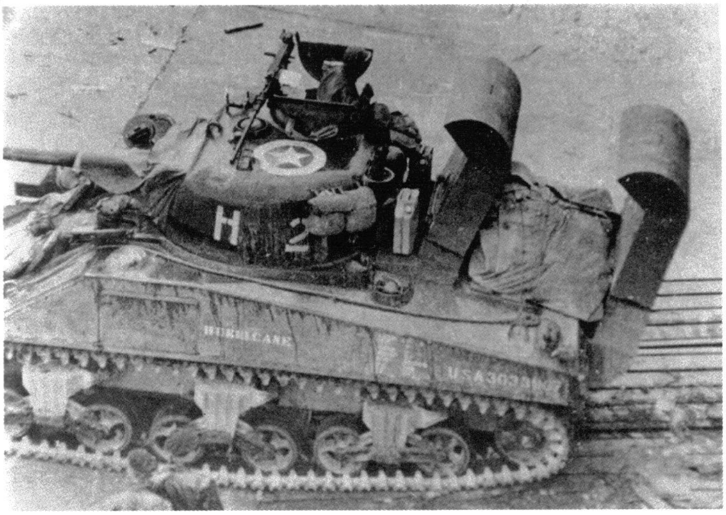
"Cozy II", a M4 of Co. C, 751st Tank Battalion fires on targets near Belvedere, Italy on 22 February 1945. The solider on the right is observing the fire away from the tank, as often the smoke from the tank gun and machine guns would obscure the target to the tank crew.



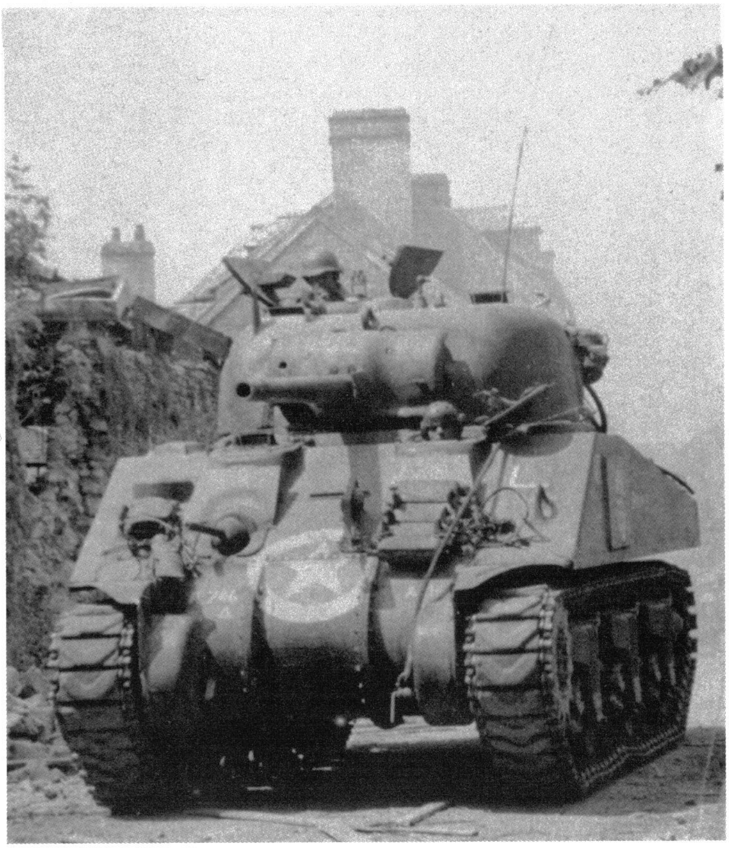
One of the multiple rocket launchers used in Italy was the 7.2 inch M17 "Whizbang". It was used in relatively modest numbers, and a few were sent to southern France with Seventh Army.



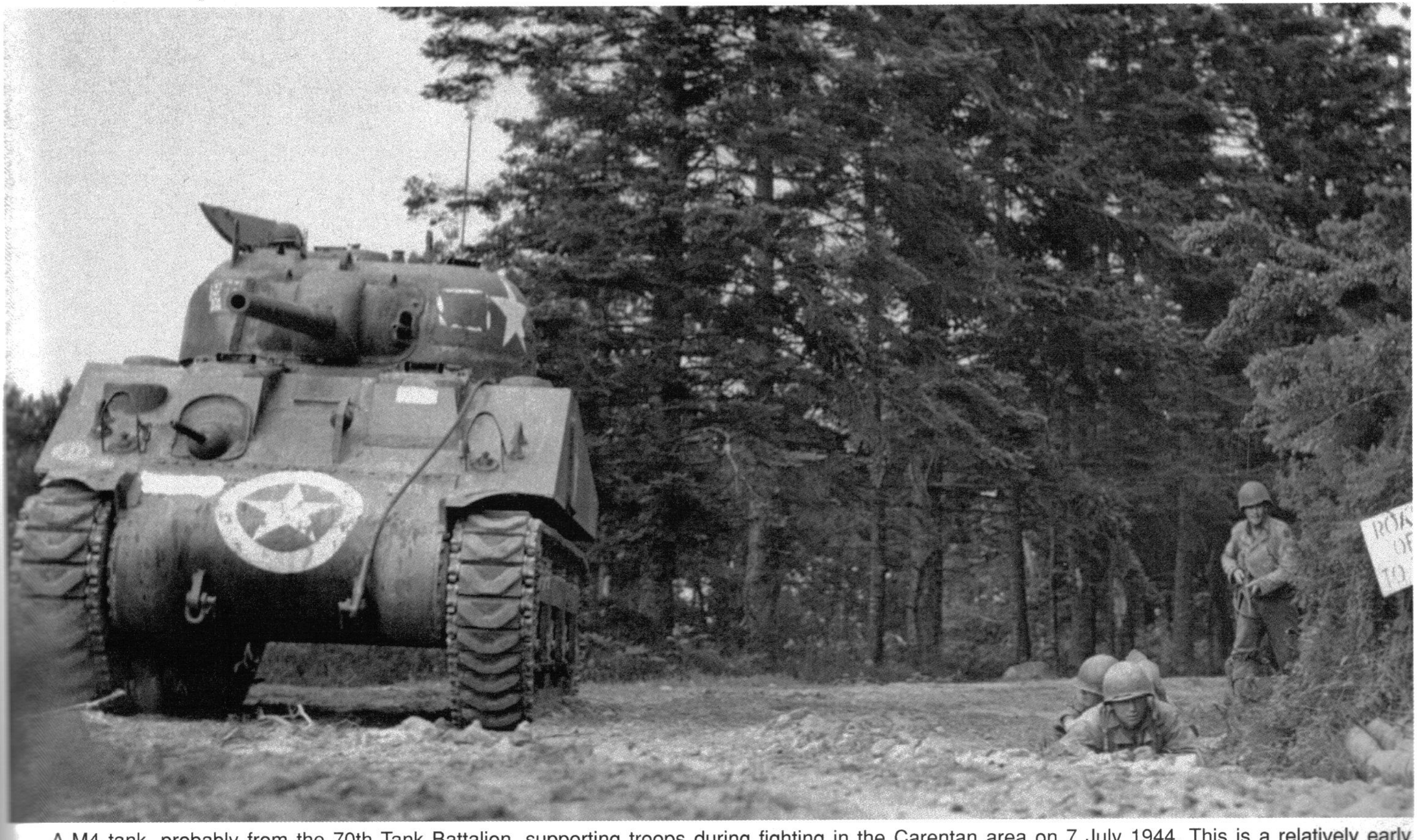
M4A1 "C-9", named "Comic", of Co. C, 751st Tank Battalion in operations near Mt. Valbura, Italy on 14 April 1945. Besides the bumper code identifying the unit, the tank also has its shipping code, "6692", painted below and to the left.



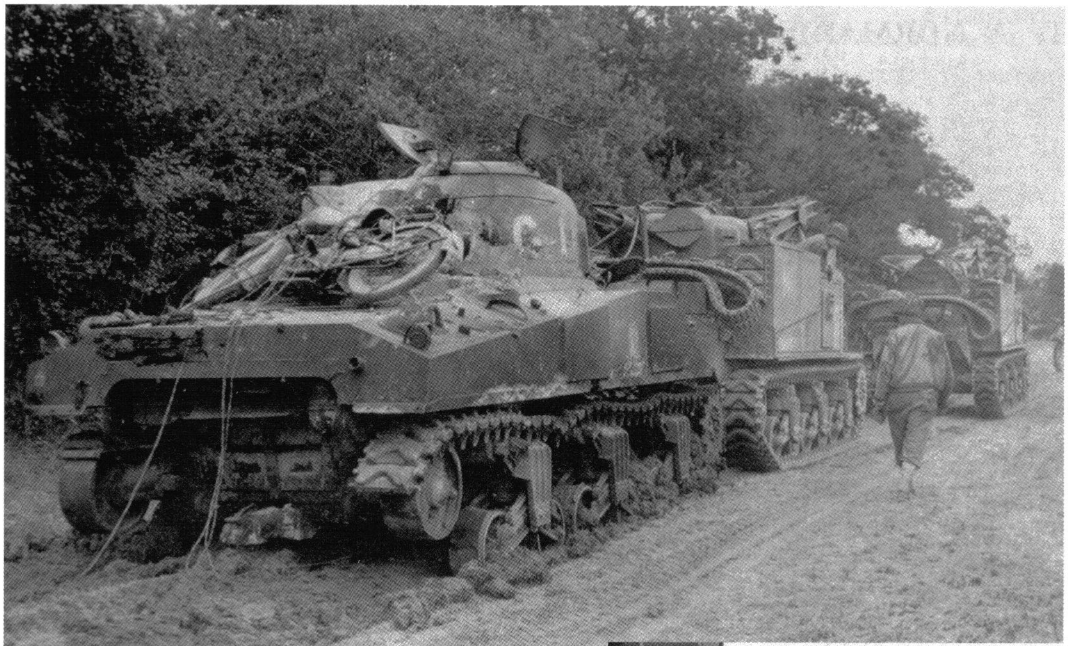
The landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944 were supported by M4 tanks in the Duplex Drive (DD) configuration, and tanks with deep wading trunks. This tank, "H2 Hurricane" from Co. H, 66th Armored Regt., 2nd Armored Div. comes ashore at Utah beach on D+1. The wading trunks were added to many tanks since the LSTs could often not make it all the way to the beach. The wading trunks allowed the tank to be dropped in water deeper than their hull roofs since the wading trunks and sealant prevented water from flooding the tank.



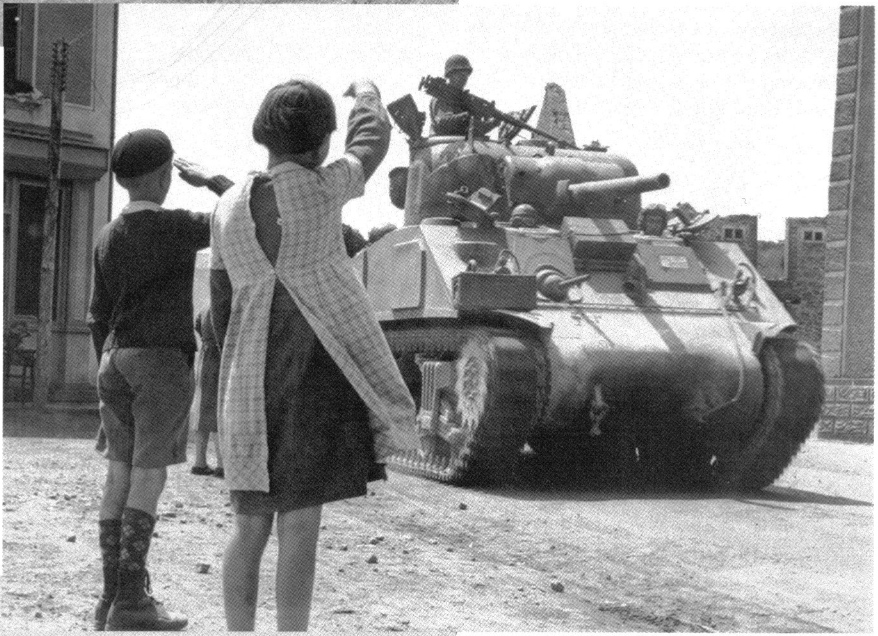
A M4 tank of Co. A, 746th Tank Bn. passes through St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte during the fighting in Normandy in June 1944. This unit was used to support the 82nd Airborne Division during the initial June fighting.



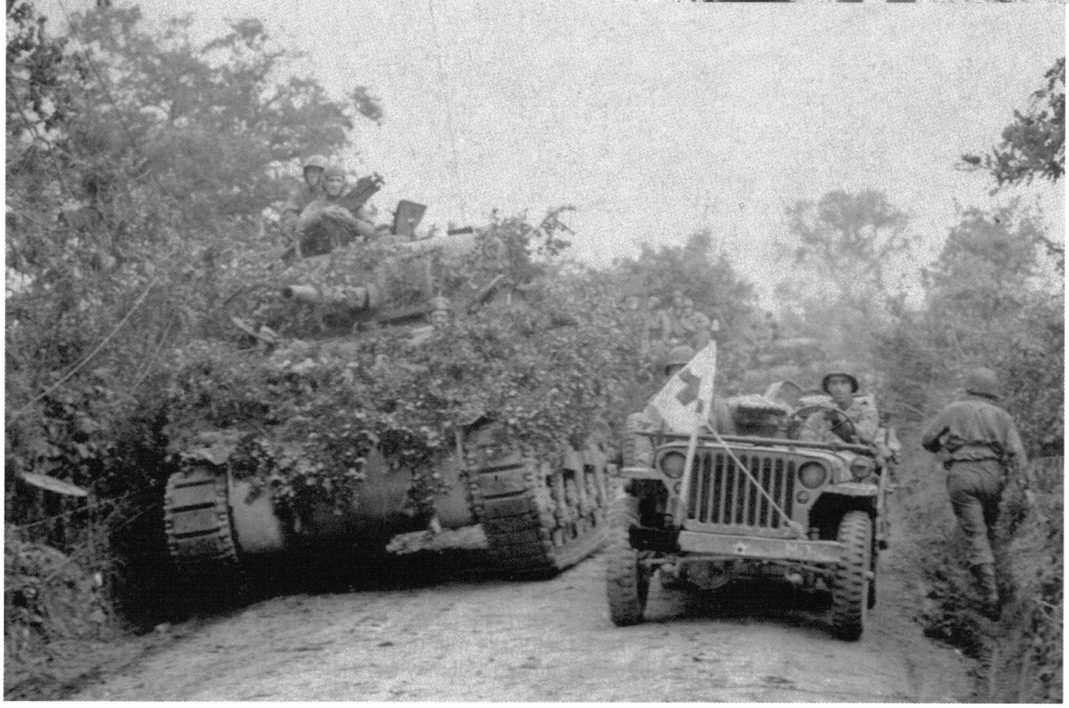
A M4 tank, probably from the 70th Tank Battalion, supporting troops during fighting in the Carentan area on 7 July 1944. This is a relatively early production M4 with the initial gun mantlet configuration without the side cheek armor. It has been rebuilt with the added hull and turret armor, probably in England. The use of the prominent Allied star was common in the initial phases of the Normandy fighting, but they were later painted out by most units since they provided too inviting a target to German gunners.



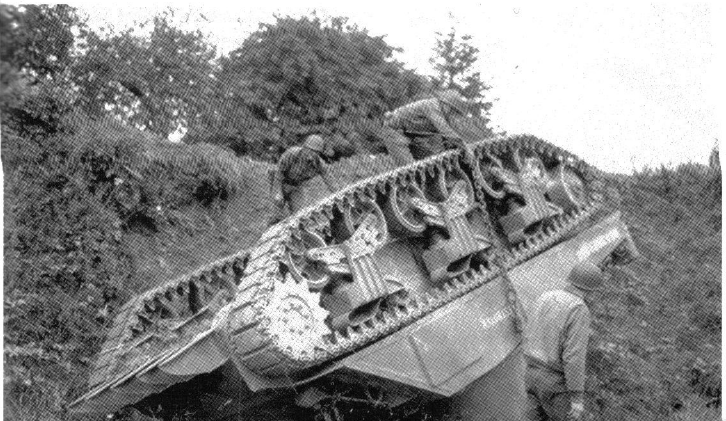
On 14 July 1944, a pair of T2 armored recovery vehicles are used to recover a burned M4 tank from CCB, 3rd Armored Div. during the intense fighting around Le Desert earlier in the week.



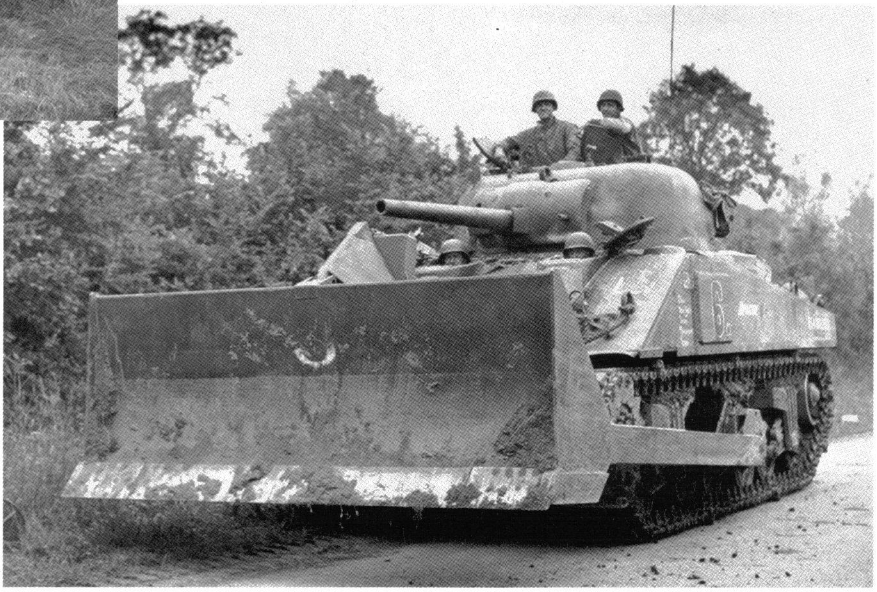
A pair of French children wave to the crew of a passing M4 tank moving through the town of St. Paul du Verney, east of the fighting for St. Lo on 17 July 1944. At this stage of the Normandy campaign, the M4 and M4A1 tanks with 75mm gun were the only types of medium tanks in service with the First Army.



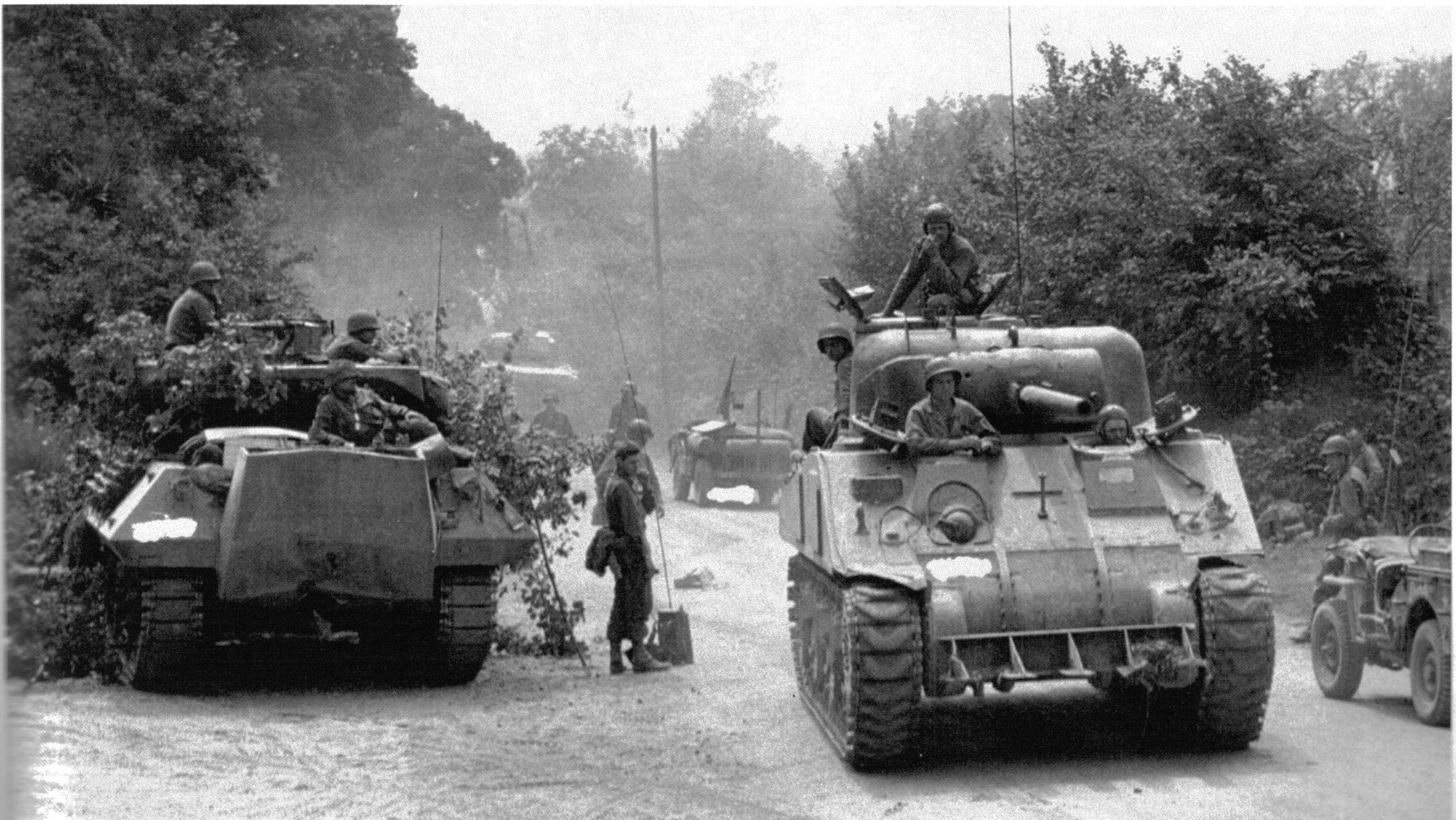
A well camouflaged M4 of the 70th Tank Battalion is passed by a medic's jeep during the preparations for Operation "Cobra", the US break-out from the Normandy beach-head. During the Normandy fighting, the 70th Tank Battalion provided support to the 4th Infantry Division.



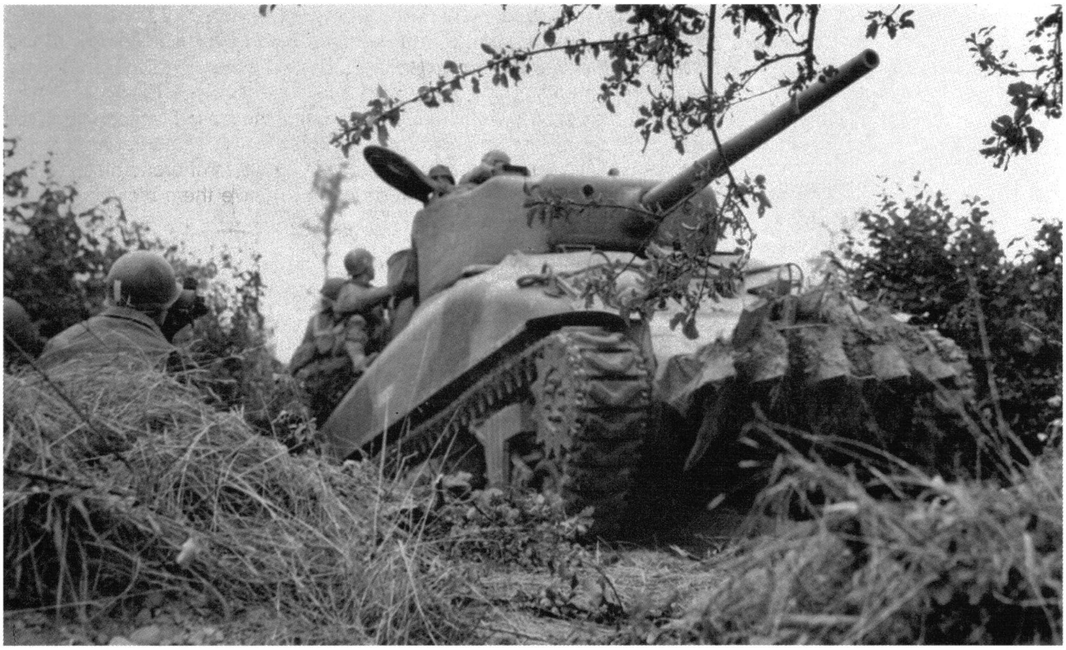
An ordnance team prepares to recover "Destroyer", a M4 tank of 2nd Armored Division that has overturned after going over a hedgerow at too steep an angle near Canisy during the July 1944 Operation "Cobra". Prior to the "Cobra" operation, one out of every five of the division's tanks were fitted with Culin prongs as is seen here on the front of the tank, used to try to make gaps in the thick Norman hedgerows. Armored units in the First Army were also systematically camouflage painted with a pattern of broad black bands over the usual olive drab finish in an effort to make them more difficult to target.



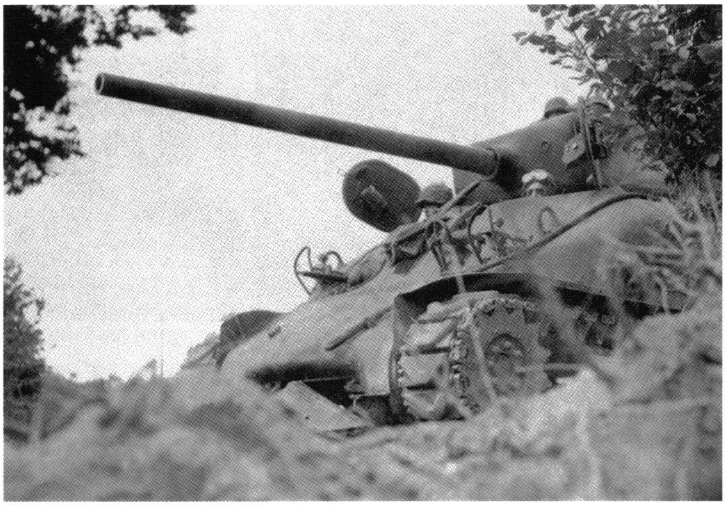
One of the key pieces of equipment during Operation "Cobra" was the M1 bulldozer blade, seen here fitted to "Apache", from Co. A, 70th Tank Battalion near Tribehou on 25 July 1944. Although the Culin prongs are more famous as a means to break through the Norman hedgerows, the bulldozer blades were in fact more effective. Each of the separate tank battalions was provided with five or six tank dozers for the "Cobra" breakout.



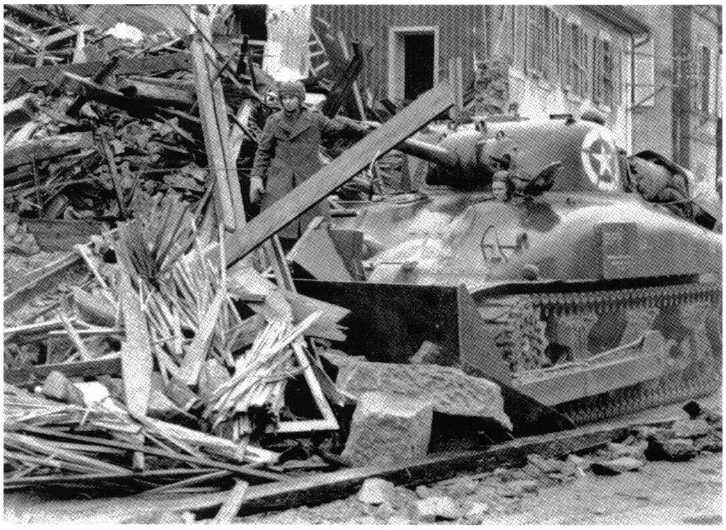
A M4 fitted with the Culin prongs passes by a M10 3-inch gun motor carriage during the opening phases of Operation "Cobra" in late July 1944. Although there was much publicity about the Culin prongs, many veterans have said that the devices did not work very well in breaking through the thick Norman hedgerows.



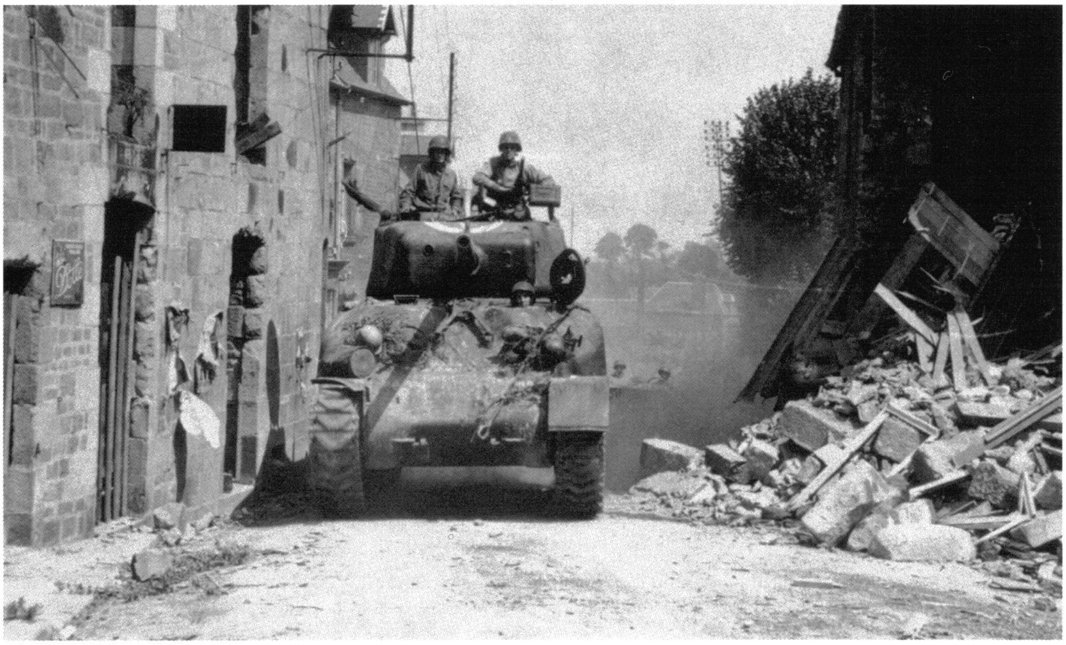
One of the new M4A1 (76) is seen breaking over the top of a hedgerow near Pont Hebert during the opening phases of Operation "Cobra". A total of 102 of these were split evenly between the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions when first delivered on 22 July 1944. It was hoped that the 76mm gun would be the trick in dealing with the German Panther tank, but Operation "Cobra" showed that it was inadequate when dealing with the well angled frontal armor of the Panther.



A M4A1 (76) of the 33rd Arm'd Regt., 3rd Armored Div. in combat near Reffuveille on 7 August 1944. The success of Operation "Cobra" pushed the US Army out of the restrictive hedgerow country along the coast into the more open pastures of Brittany where the armored divisions could maneuver.

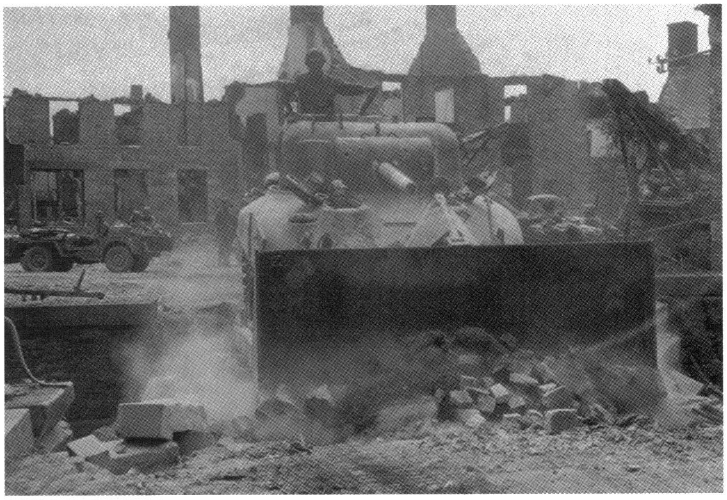


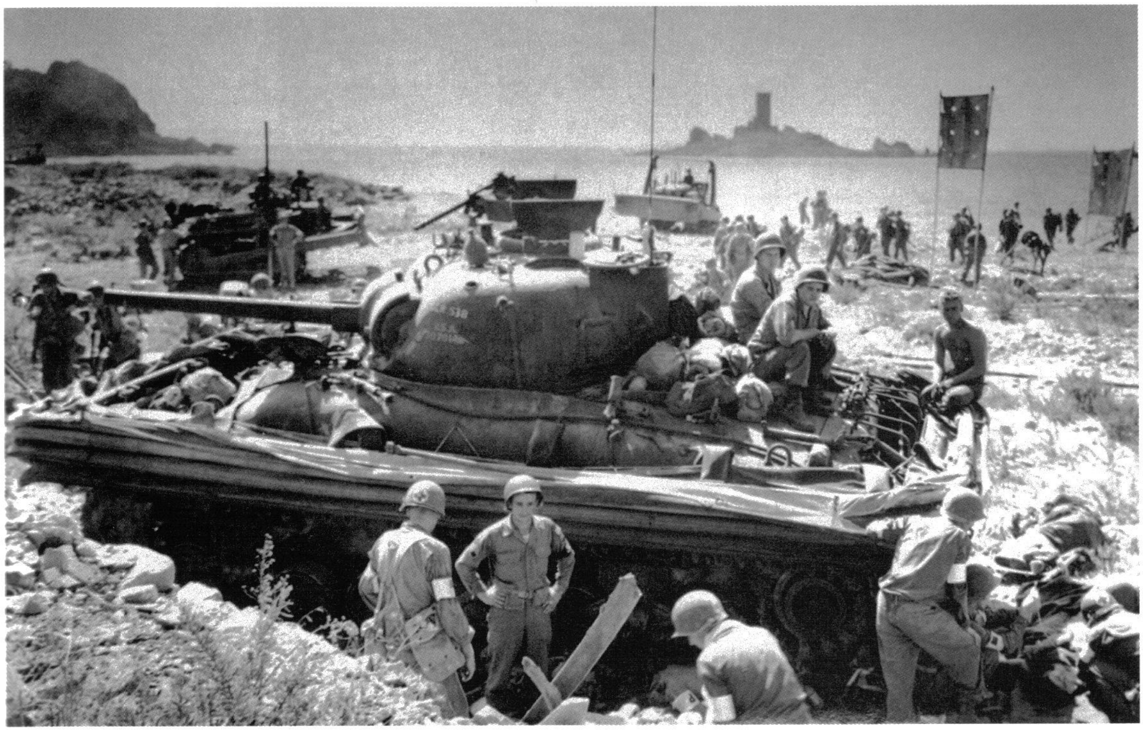
A M4A1 fitted with a M1 bulldozer blade is used to clean up debris in a French town. The heavy air bombardment that preceded "Cobra" caused havoc to French towns in its path, and the bulldozers were instrumental in clearing roads for following waves of troops.



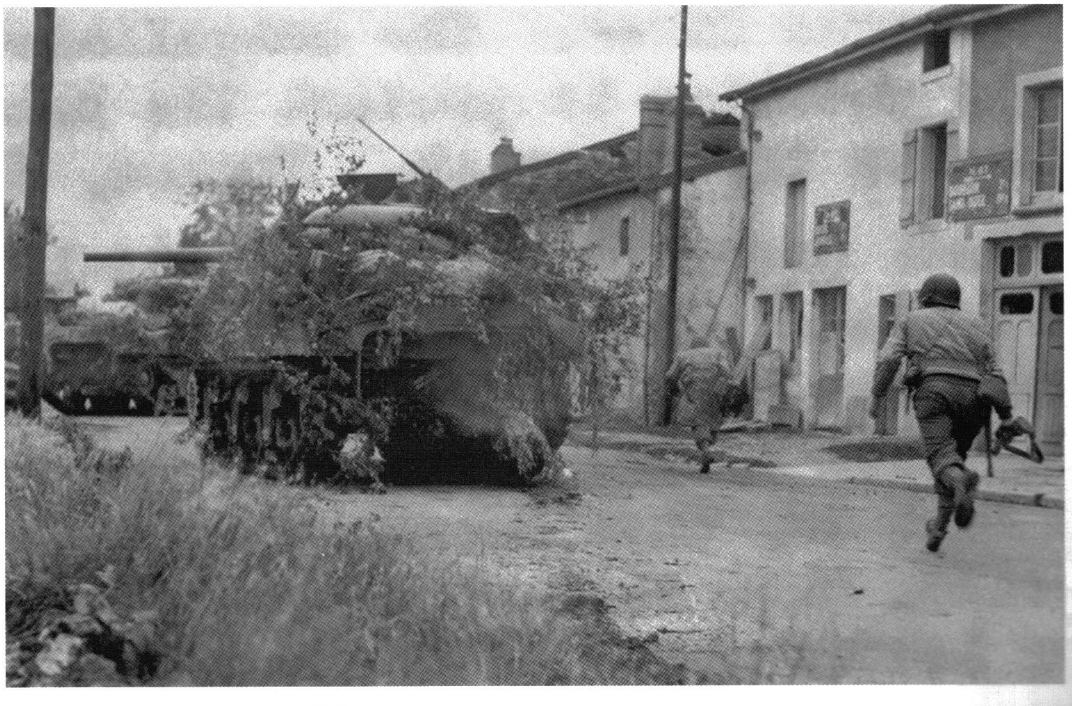
A M4A1 (76) of the 67th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. passes through Sever Calvados on 3 August 1944 during the Normandy break-out. Close inspection of the turret roof shows the edge of the large Allied star painted on the roof to help in aerial identification. Operation "Cobra" was the first time that US Army began to use fluorescent red and yellow air identification panels for air recognition purposes.

A M4A1 dozer tank is used to clean up the ruins in Lonlay-L'Abbaye on 15 August 1944 during the pursuit of the German army towards Paris. To the right behind the tank, a T2 armored recovery vehicle can be seen.

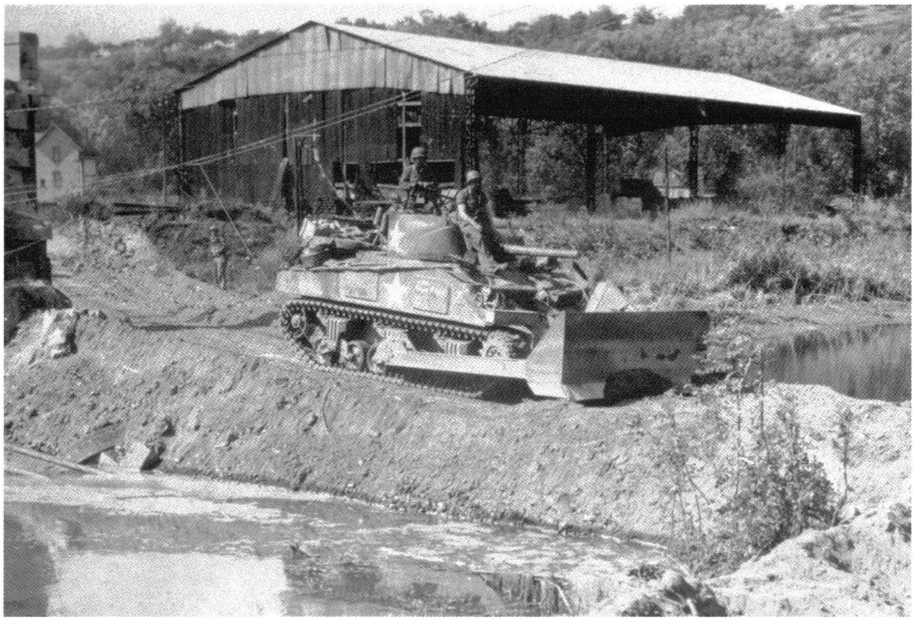




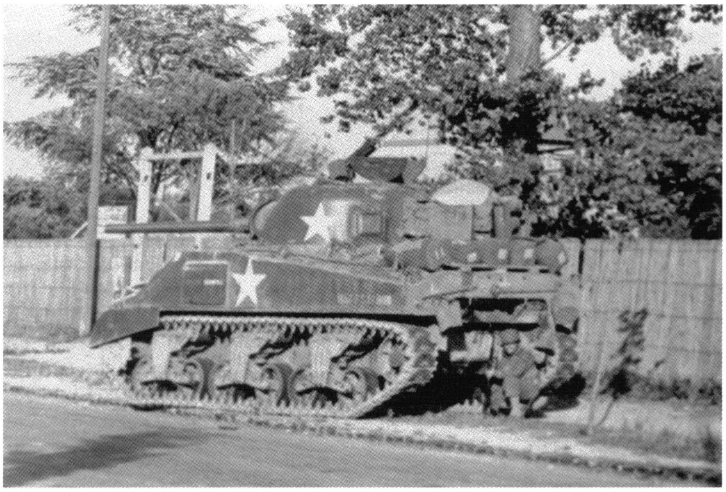
While the US First and Third Armies were conducting the pursuit following the Normandy breakout, the US Seventh Army landed on the southern French coast near Marseilles as part of Operation "Dragoon" to unhinge the German defenses in central and western France. This is one of the M4A1 DD amphibious tanks of the 753rd Tank Battalion landed near St. Tropez. This shows the canvas floatation collar folded down after the tank has reached shore.



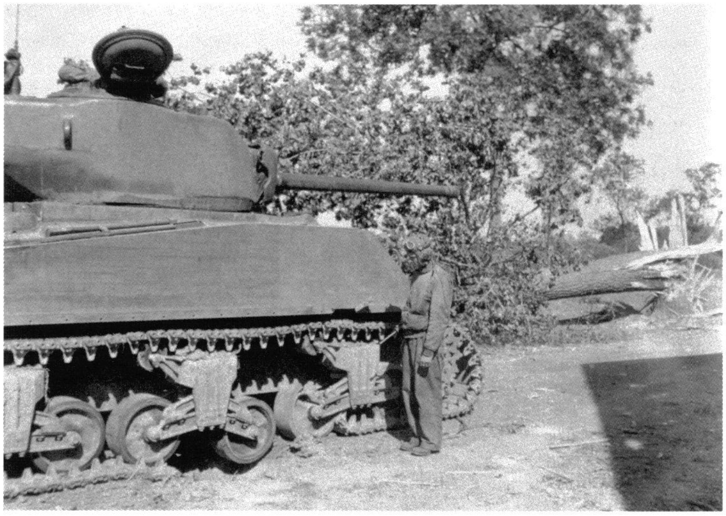
The collapse of German defenses in France in mid-August led to a rapid Allied drive to eastern France and the Belgian frontier. Here, infantry scurry past a well camouflaged M4 tank during street fighting by Patton's Third Army in a town along the Marne on 31 August 1944.



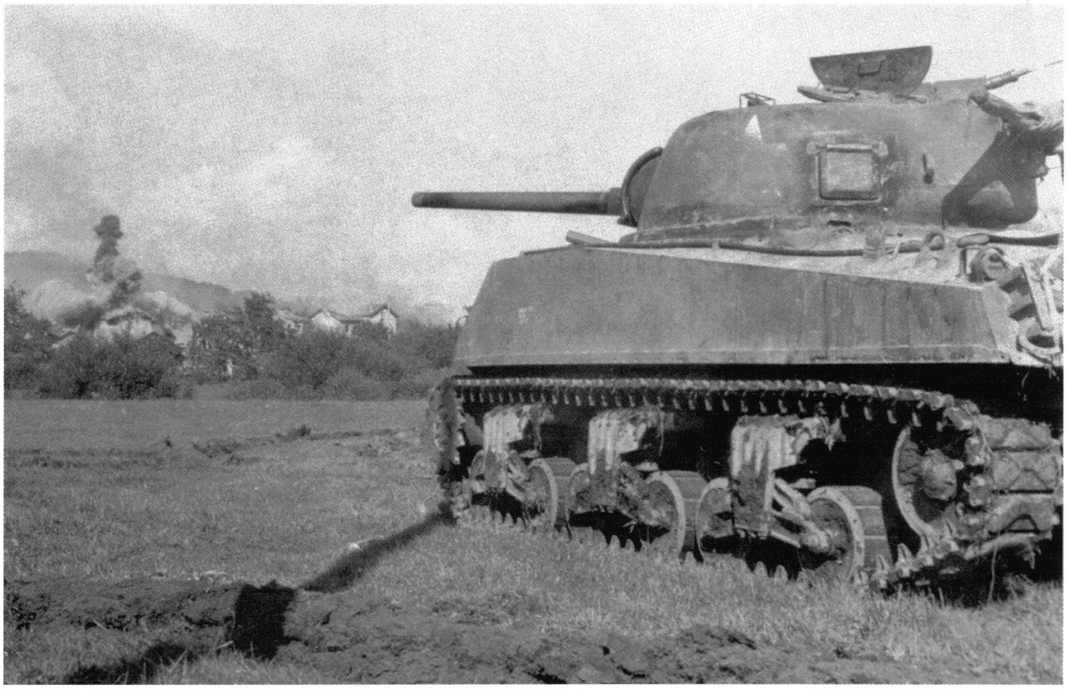
By mid September, Patton's Third Army had reached the Moselle river and began efforts to make a crossing in force. The northern crossing of the Moselle took place near the town of Dieulouard. Here a M4 bulldozer tank is used to create a roadway across a narrow tributary of the Moselle river on 12 September.



As the lead element in Patton's northern thrust into Lorraine, the 7th Armored Division was the first to reach the fortress city of Metz. This is a forward observer tank of the 440th Armored Field Artillery Bn. which would travel with lead elements of the division and radio back information to the howitzer batteries for fire missions. (Patton Museum)

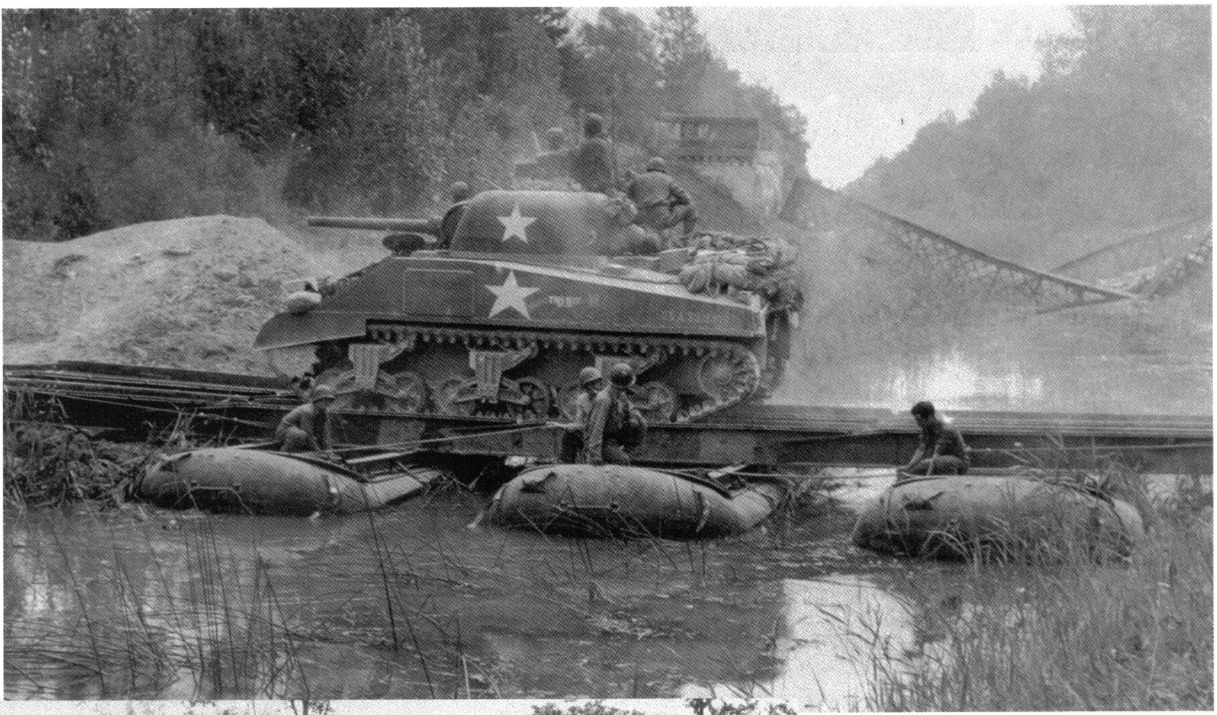


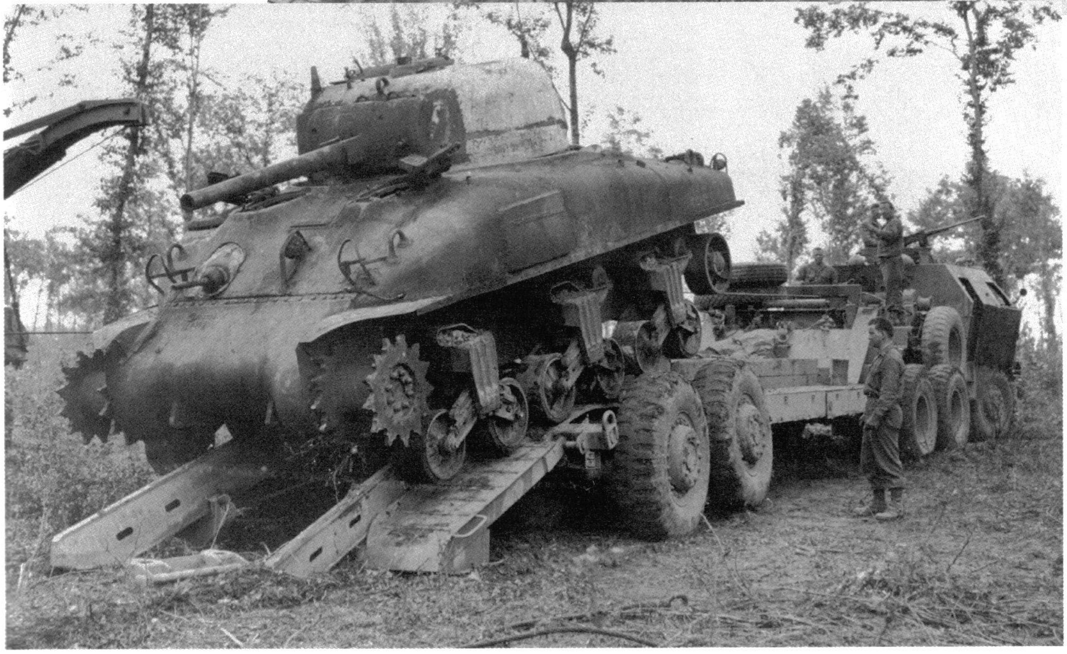
This M4 (76) of the 749th Tank Battalion was disabled near Charmes on 12 September during the fighting between the US 79th Division and the German 16th Infantry Division. An anti-personnel mine has gone off under the second bogie assembly, severing the track.



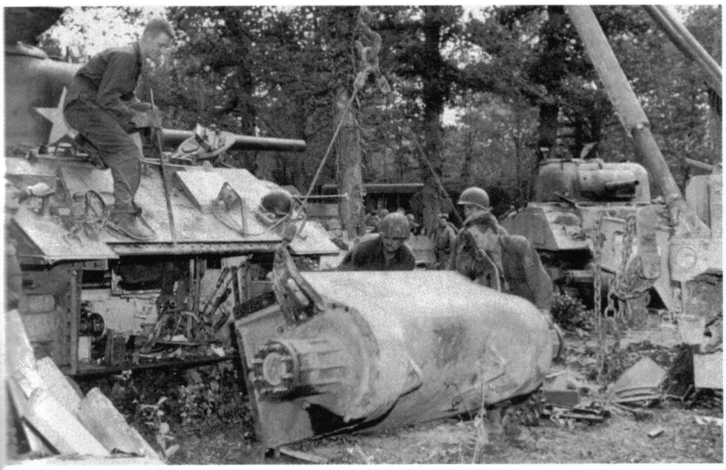
Patton's forces surrounded the provincial capital of Lorraine at Nancy, and the 4th Armored Division got over the Moselle river near Bayon. Here, a M4 medium tank of the 737th Tank Battalion fires on buildings near Dombasle, along the left flank of the advance on 15 September 1944 in support of the 320th Infantry which was crossing a nearby canal at the time.

Although the Germans destroyed most of the bridges over the Moselle, the US Army's engineers rapidly created pontoon treadway bridges sufficient for tanks to cross. Here on 16 September, an M4 crosses the Moselle on a treadway bridge, while in the background, the destroyed local bridge can be seen.

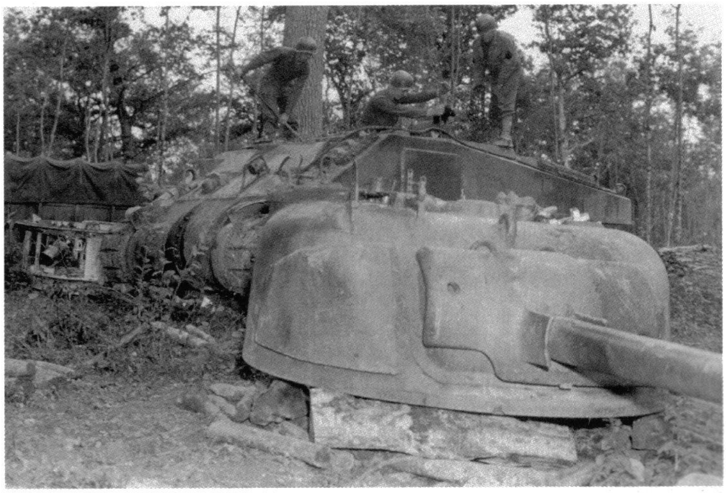




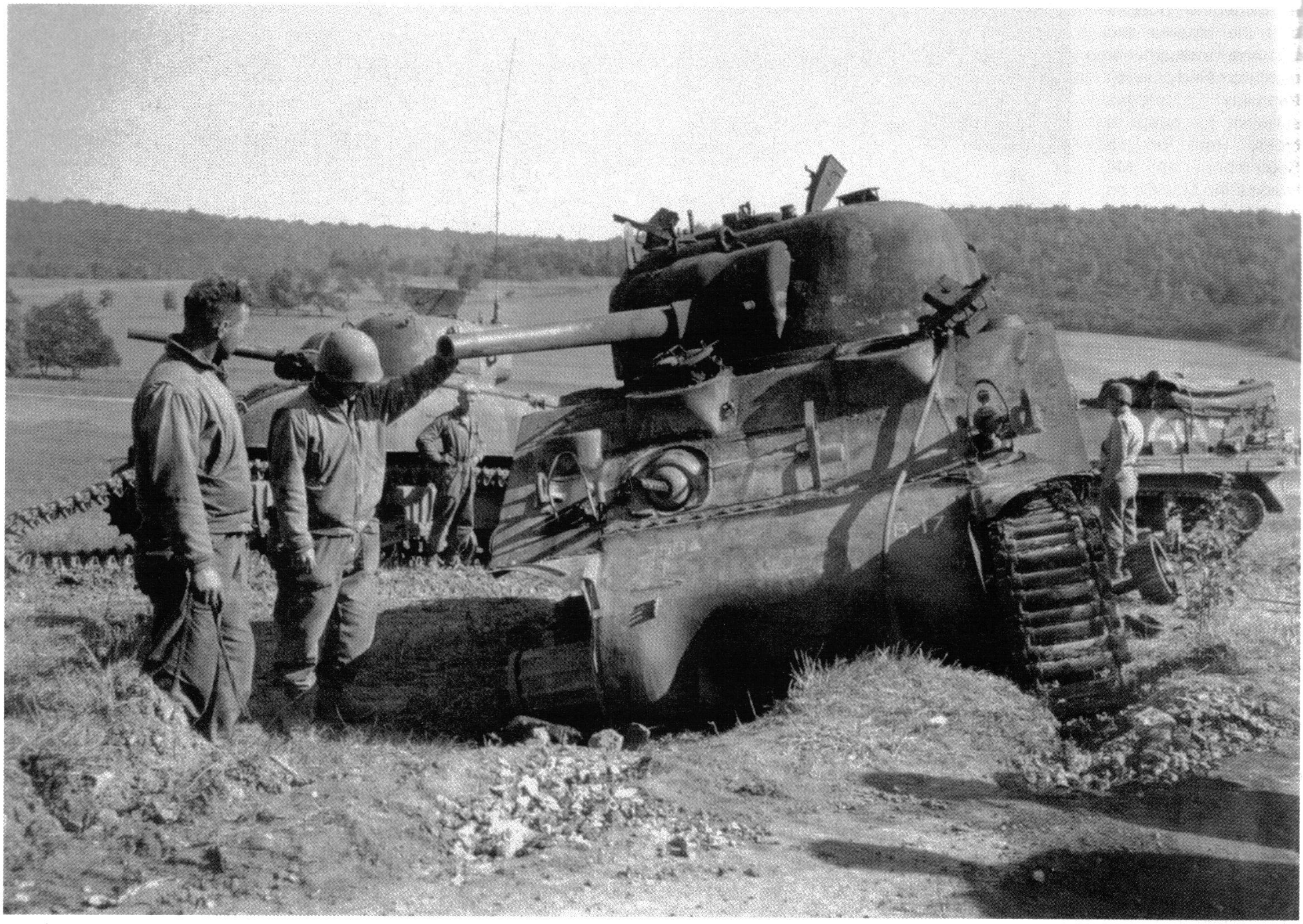
A burned out M4A1 tank is recovered by a M25 Dragon Wagon on 22 September. This tank shows the wider mantlet adopted on the M34A1 gun mount on later production M4A1 tanks.



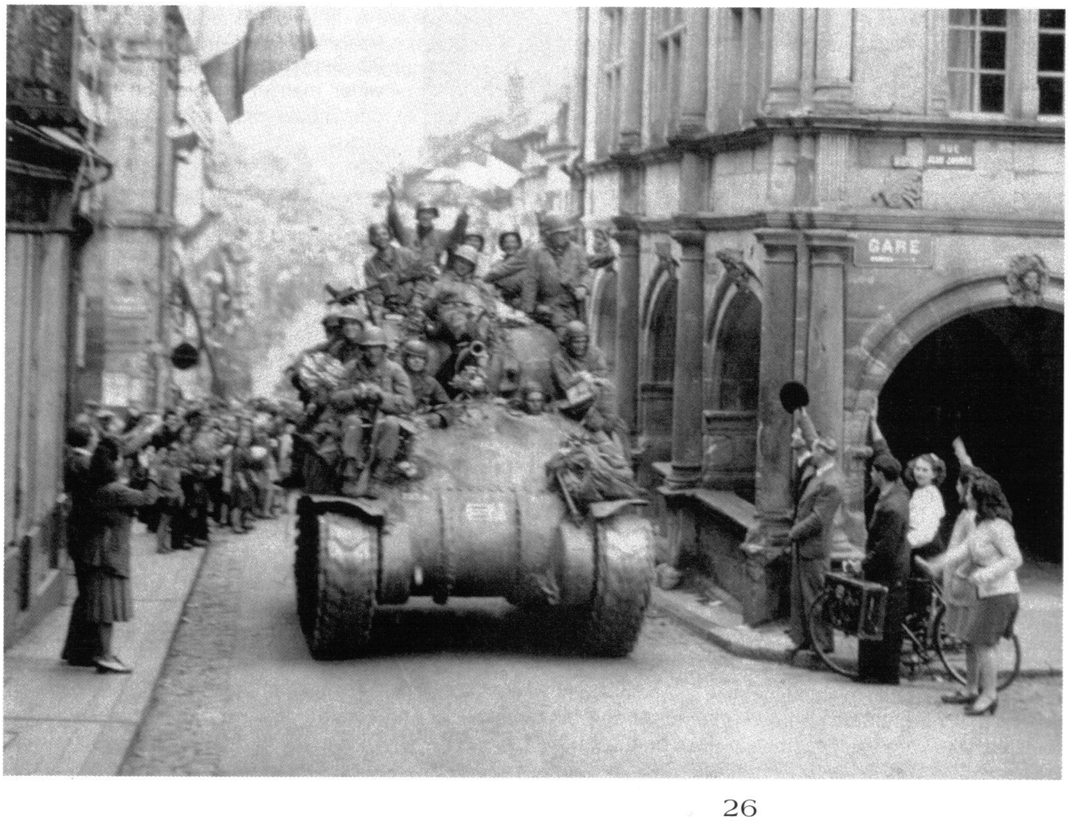
In response to Patton's attacks, Hitler ordered a panzer counter-attack in Lorraine by four of the new panzer brigades. These attacks culminated in a series of intense tank battles around Arracourt on 21-27 September. Here, a M4 has its transmission serviced in a forested work area during the fighting.



Another view of the Third Army's forested tank workshop, this time with the turret of a M4 removed for servicing the hull. The turret basket can be seen on the ground beyond the tank, while the turret itself is propped up on logs.

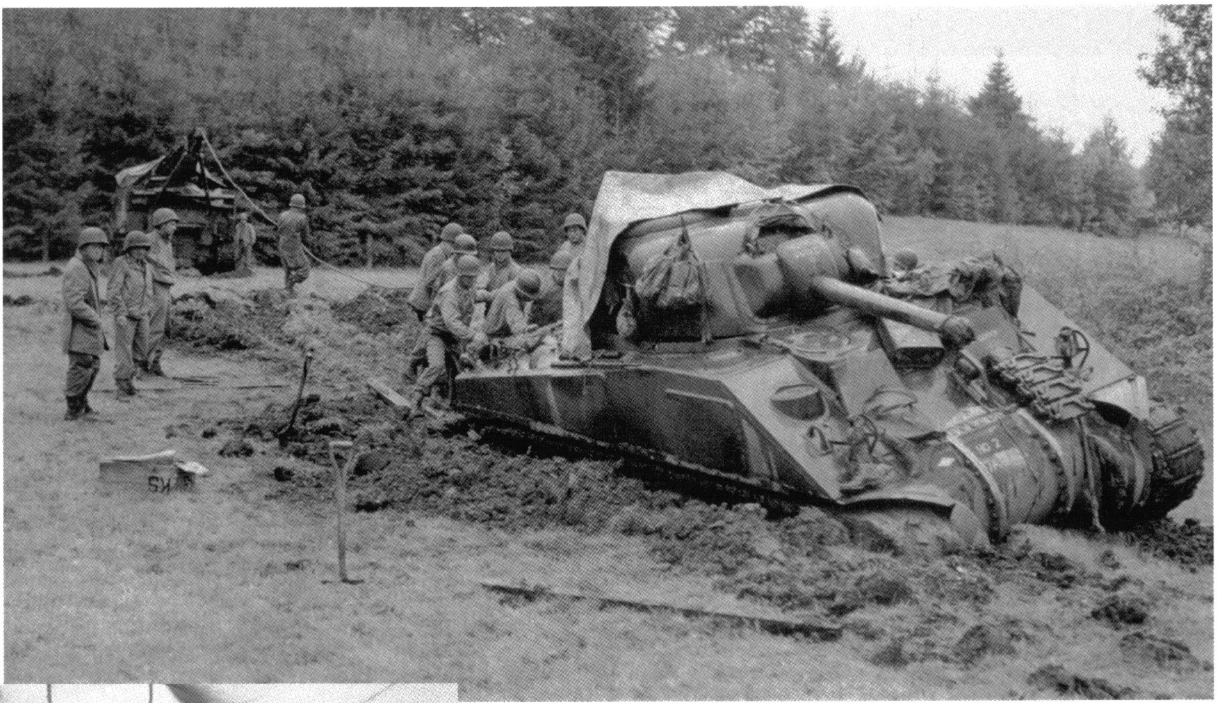


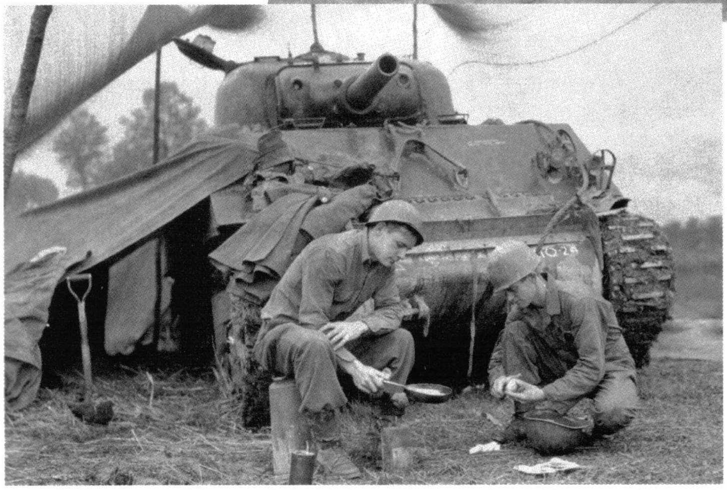
While Patton moved into Lorraine, Dever's Seventh Army to the south advanced towards Alsace and to the Swiss border. This is a pair of M4 tanks of Co. B, 756th Tank Battalion, veterans of the Italian campaign, knocked out during the fighting near Vesovi on 12 September 1944 as Third and Seventh Army were attempting to link-up.



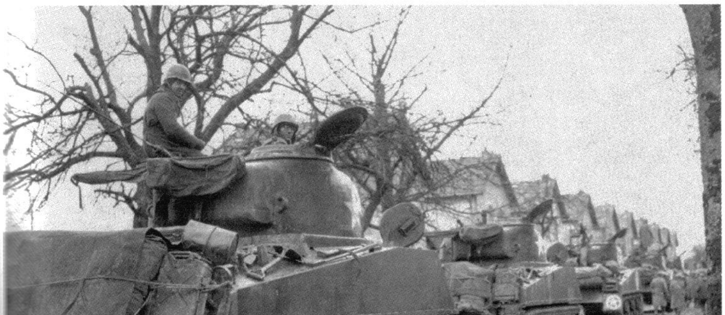
A crew of a M4A1 of the 753rd Tank Battalion enjoys the jubilation of the French crowds as the Seventh Army moved through St. Marie on 16 September. This tank is a veteran of the Italian campaign, and carries the characteristic Mediterranean style of the shipping code marking on its bow.

September 1944 was one of the wettest on record in Europe, with many fields being turned to mud by the rain. Here, a M4 of the 59th Armored Field Artillery Bn. HQ company is retrieved by a wrecker after having become bogged down in a field near Plombieres on 26 September 1944.

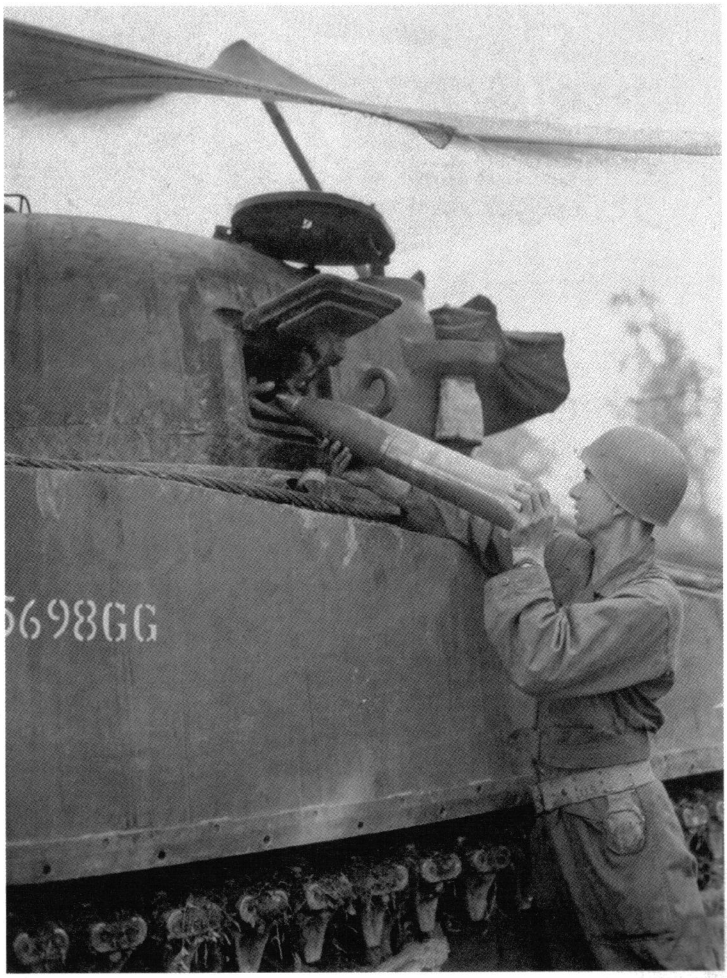




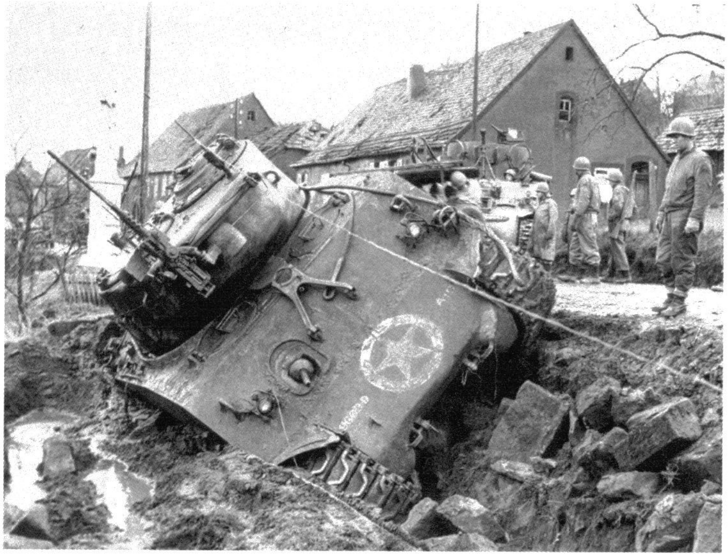
The crew of a M4 (105) assault gun of the HQ company, 191st Tank Bn. cook food during a lull in the fighting near Rambervillers, France on 15 October 1944. The M4(105) was fitted with a 105mm howitzer instead of the normal 75mm gun, and was used to provide indirect fire support for the battalion. In 1944, most tank battalions had six of these attached to the HQ company.



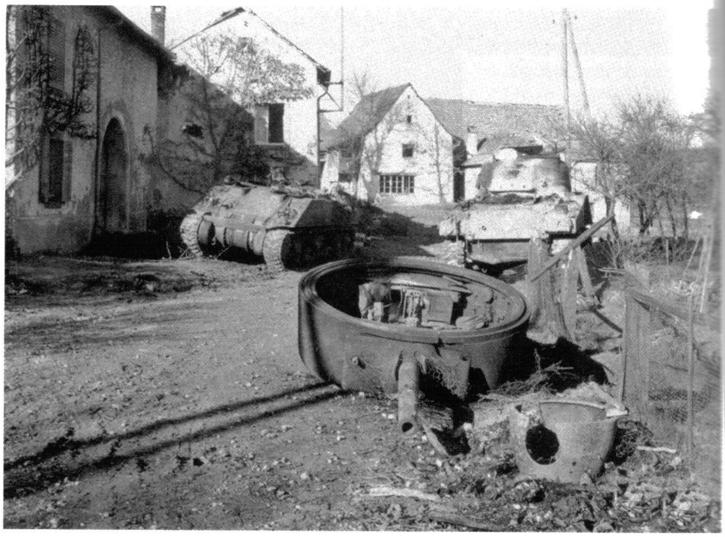
The 14th Armored Division was one of the last US armored divisions to arrive in France, docking at Marseilles on 31 October 1944. It was committed to the fighting in the Vosges region of France on 20 November 1944, and here, some M4A3 tanks of its Combat Command A move forward near Cirey, France on 23 November 1944.



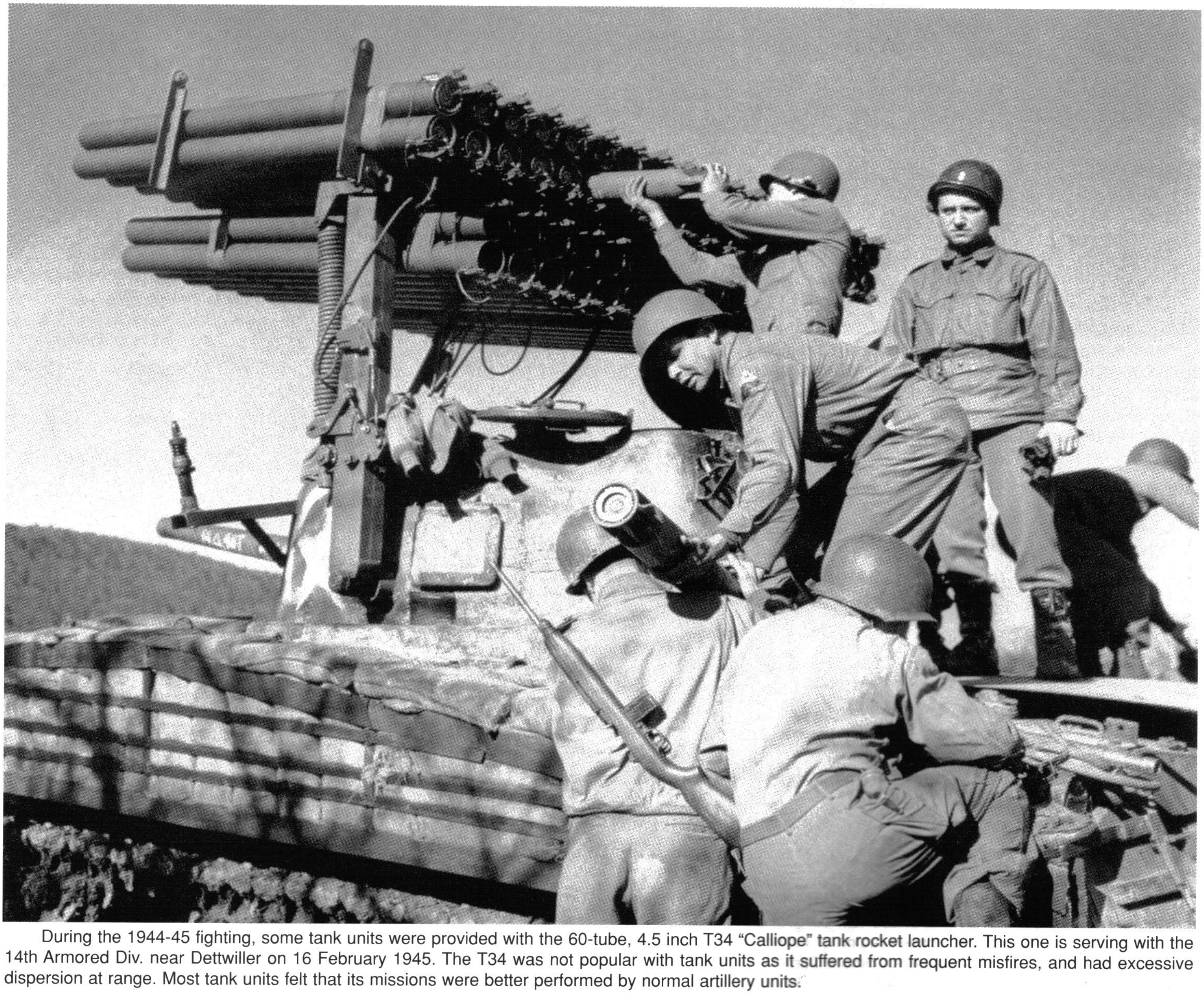
The M4 (105) assault gun was a prodigious consumer of ammunition since it was normally used on fire support missions like normal field artillery. Here, one of the crewman helps load a 105mm round through the shell ejection port on the left turret side. The stenciled "5698GG" is a shipping code for the unit.



The rainy conditions in the autumn of 1944 undermined roads, and led to accidents like this one where a M4A3 (76) of Co. A, 781st Tank Bn. slid off the road in Lamberg after the bank collapsed under its weight. It is being recovered by one of the new M32 armored recovery vehicles. Tank units in the Seventh Army sector in Alsace often used their shipping codes in place of normal bumper codes. In this case, the shipment code "9603-D" can be seen to the left of the Allied star.

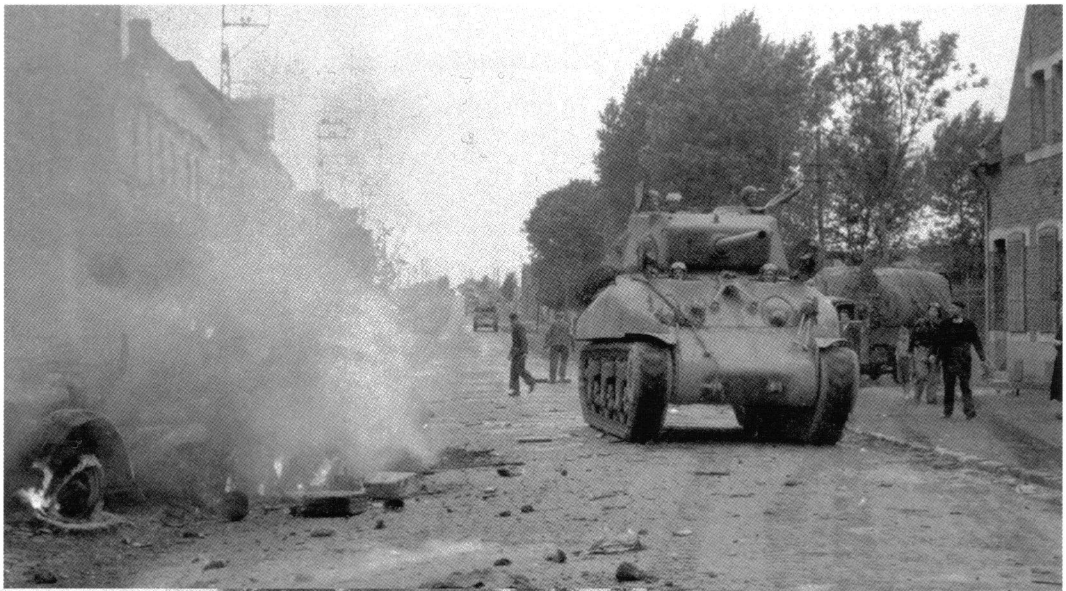


The effect of a panzerfaust anti-tank rocket could be catastrophic if it detonated the internal ammunition of an M4. This M4A2 of the French 5th Armored Division serving with the US 6th Army Group in Alsace had its turret blown off after a panzerfaust set off its ammunition during the fighting in Issans on 18 November 1944. The tank's hull can be seen in the distance.

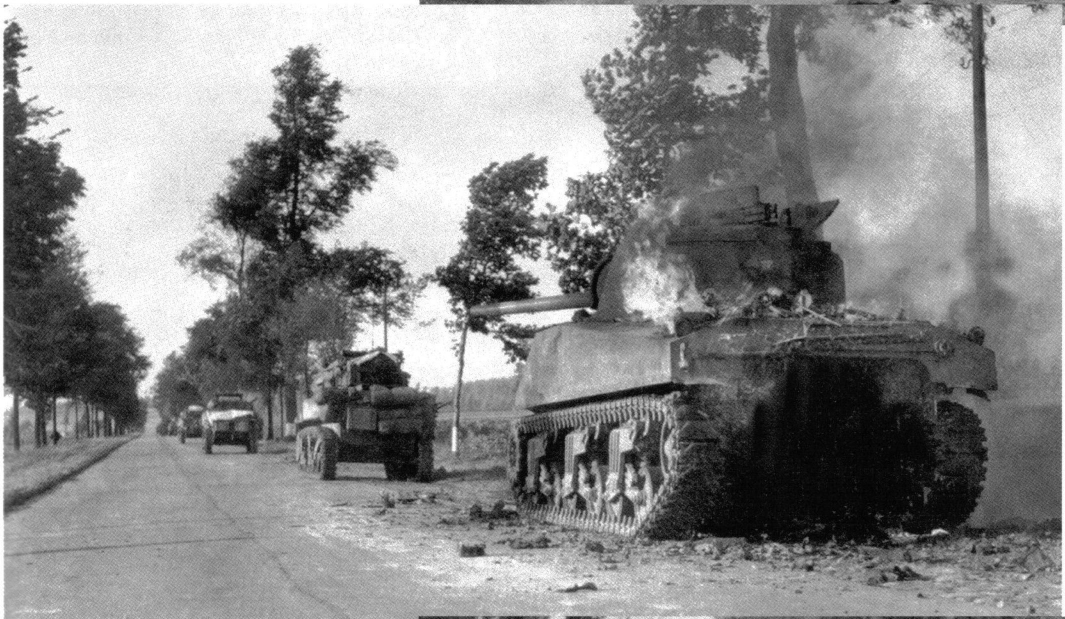


During the 1944-45 fighting, some tank units were provided with the 60-tube, 4.5 inch T34 "Calliope" tank rocket launcher. This one is serving with the 14th Armored Div. near Dettwiller on 16 February 1945. The T34 was not popular with tank units as it suffered from frequent misfires, and had excessive dispersion at range. Most tank units felt that its missions were better performed by normal artillery units.

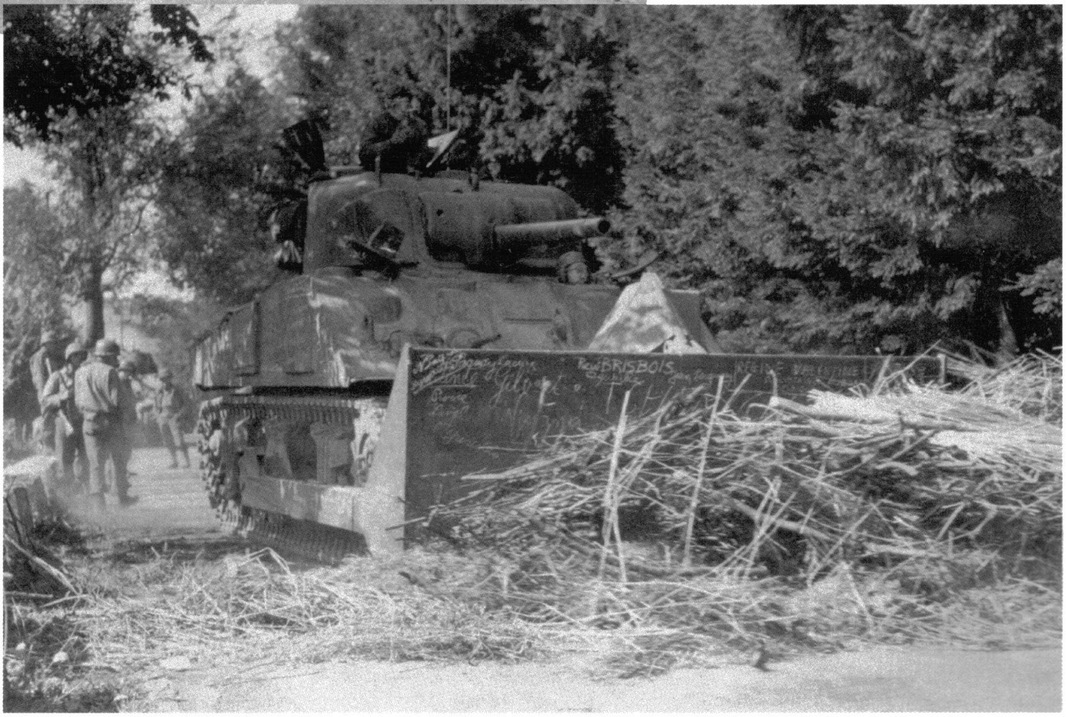
LIBERATING THE LOW COUNTRIES: 1944



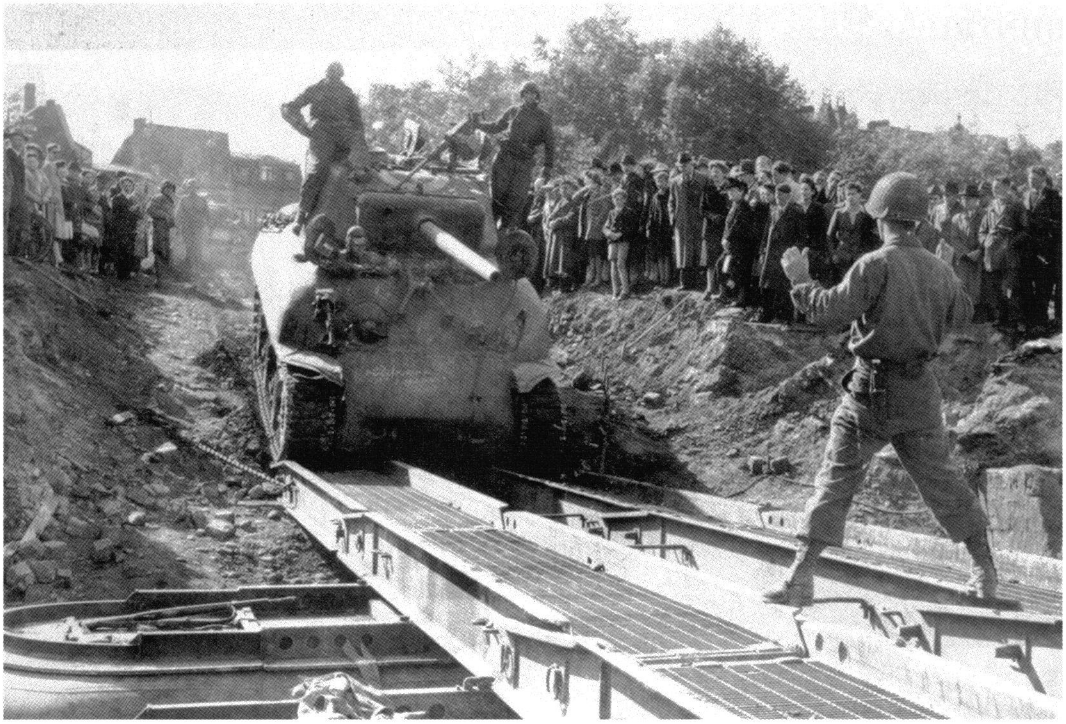
While Patton's Third Army pushed into Lorraine, Hodge's First Army pushed into Belgium. A M4A1 (76) of the 3rd Armored Div. passes by the burning wreck of a German truck in Aubencheul-au-Bac near Cambrai on its way to the Belgian frontier.



Here, an M4 from the 3rd Armored Division burns in the outskirts of Mons, Belgium while M5A1 light tanks push ahead in a race for the German border. In less than two weeks, the First Army would reach the German frontier near Aachen.

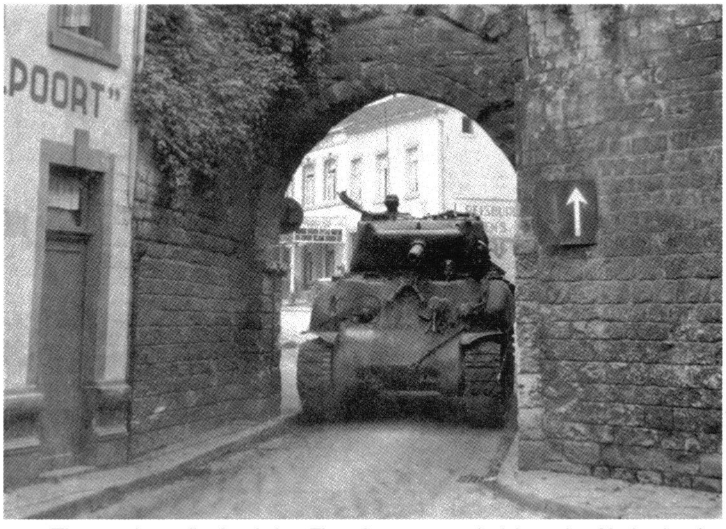


A M4 with M1 dozer clears debris from a road near Harze, Belgium. The tank is covered with chalked greetings from Belgian citizens from one of the neighboring towns.

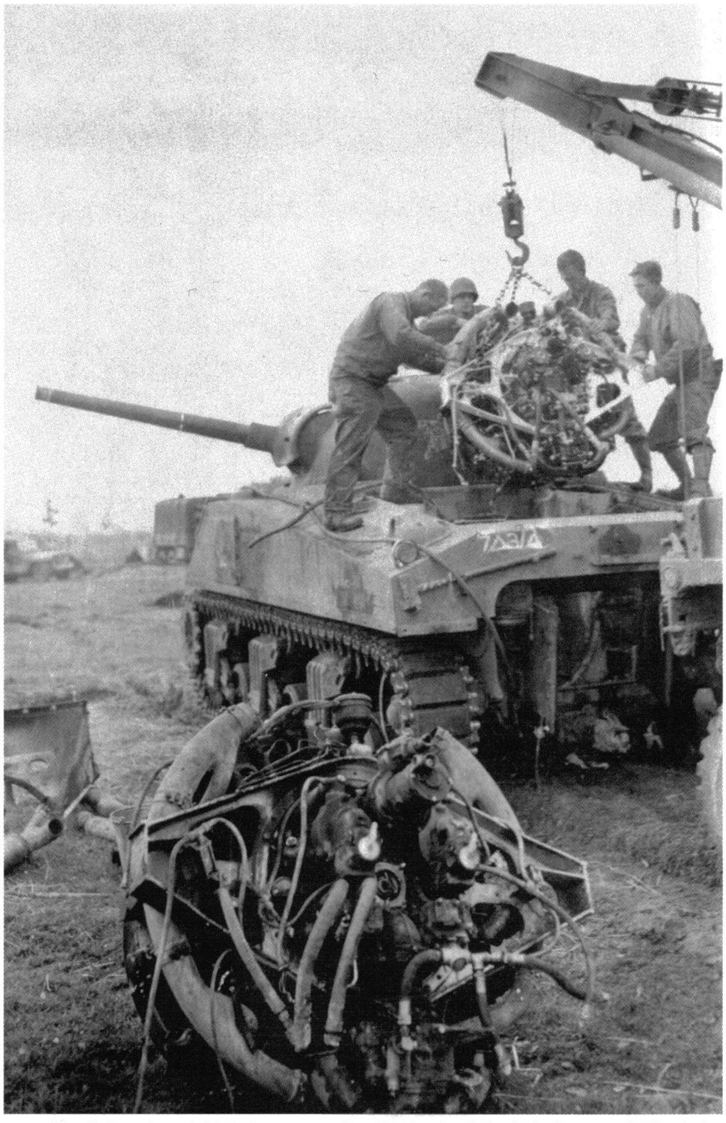


A M4A1 (76) of the 3rd Armored Div. gingerly moves down an embankment on to a treadway bridge erected over pontoons on the Meuse river near Liege, Belgium on 12 September 1944 while local citizens watch. The pontoon bridge was erected alongside the ruins of a bridge demolished by the retreating Germans as can be seen by the abutment to the right.

During a lull in the fighting in Belgium on 30 September 1944, the crew of a M4A1 takes the opportunity to clean the gun barrel of their tank.



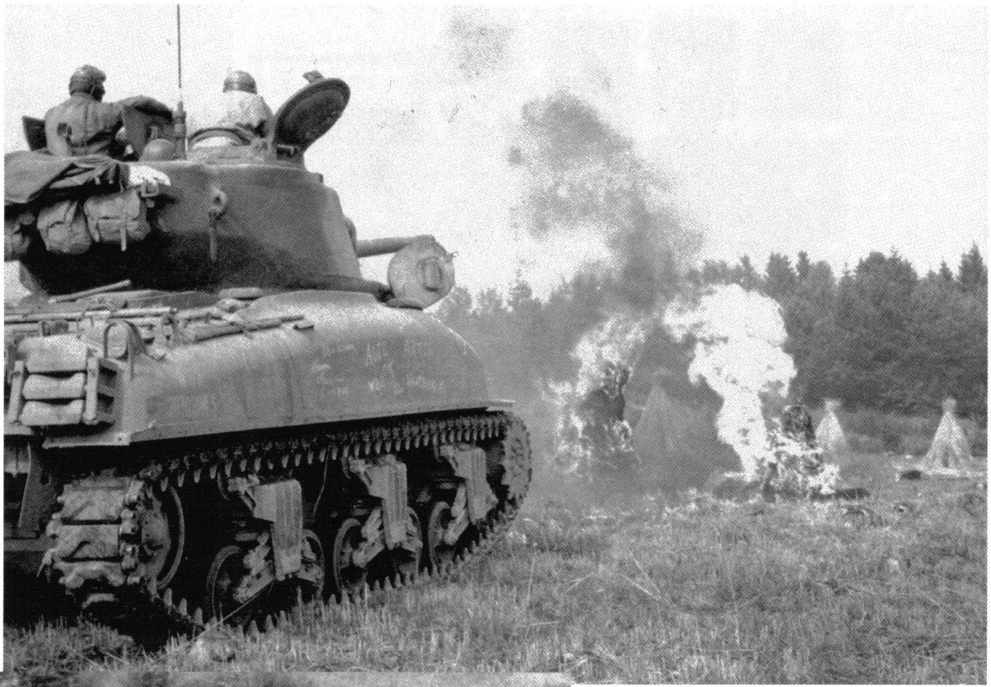
The northern flank of the First Army extended into the Netherlands. Here, a M4A1 (76) of Co. F, 66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. passes through a medieval arch in the town of Valkenberg on 17 September.

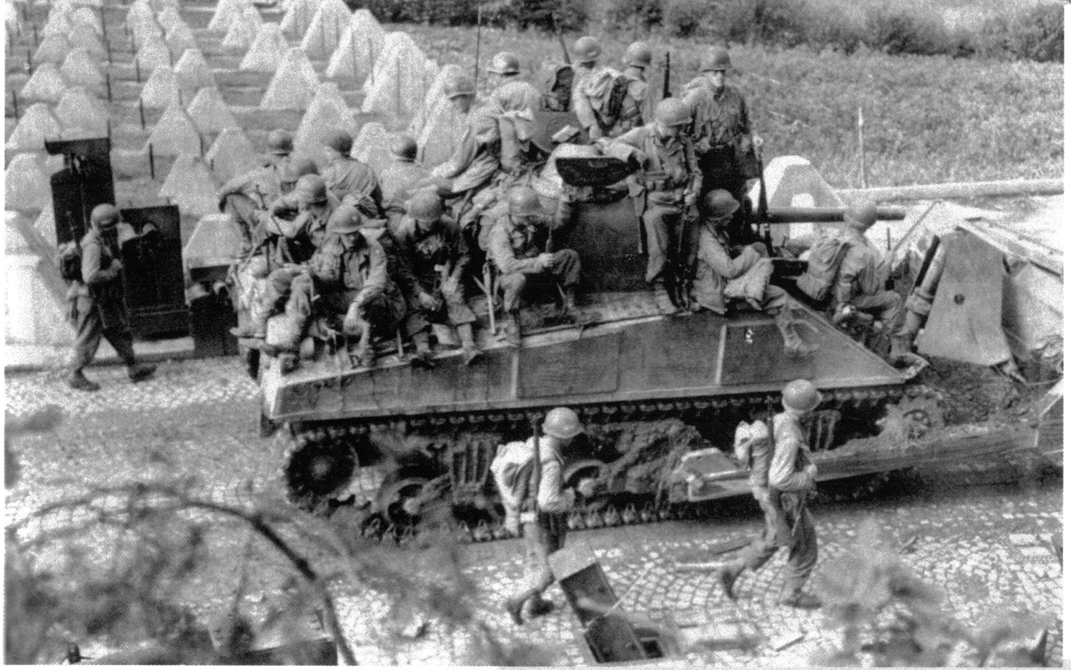


On 6 October 1944, the crew of a M4 tank of the 7th Armored Div. help ordnance repair crews swap out a Continental R975 radial engine. This radial aircraft engine powered both the M4 and M4A1 versions of the Sherman tank.

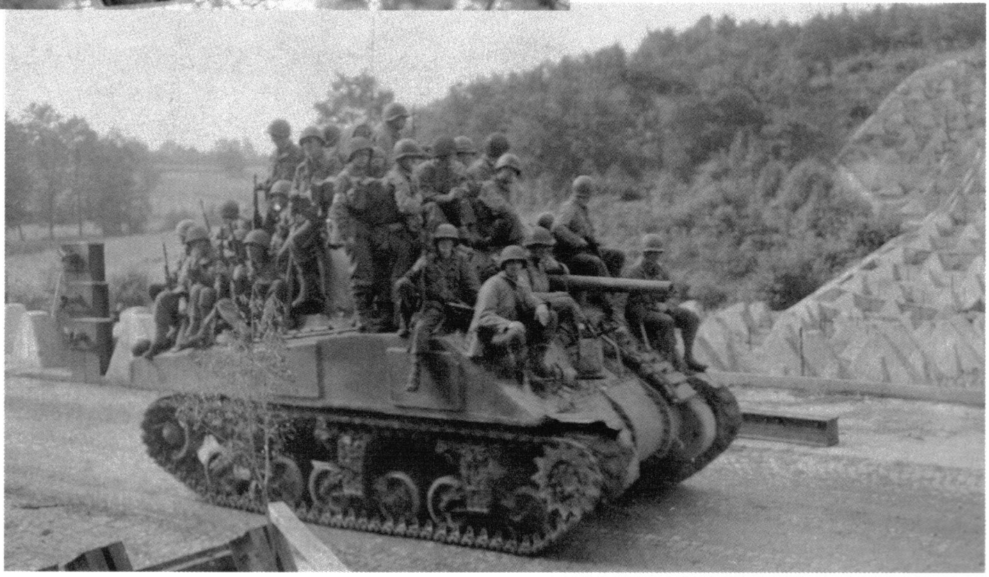
Across the Siegfried line

In anticipation of encounters with bunkers along the German Siegfried line, elements of the First Army were provided with flame-throwers. Four E4-5 flame-throwers were fitted to M4A1 (76) tanks of 70th Tank Battalion on 11 September 1944. These tanks had previously fought in the Belgian campaign, and the chalked inscriptions of Belgian civilians can be seen on the hull side during this training exercise on 13 September. Two of these tanks were temporarily attached to the 741st Tank Battalion and were used to attack a German pillbox three days later. This configuration was found seriously inadequate as the tank had to approach to within 25 yards of the pillbox, and even after using up its fuel, the pillbox was not knocked out.

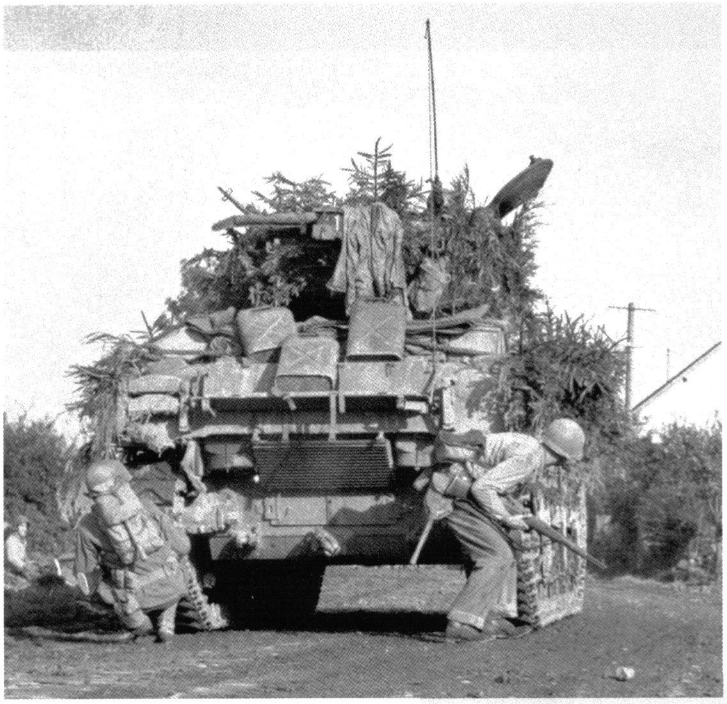


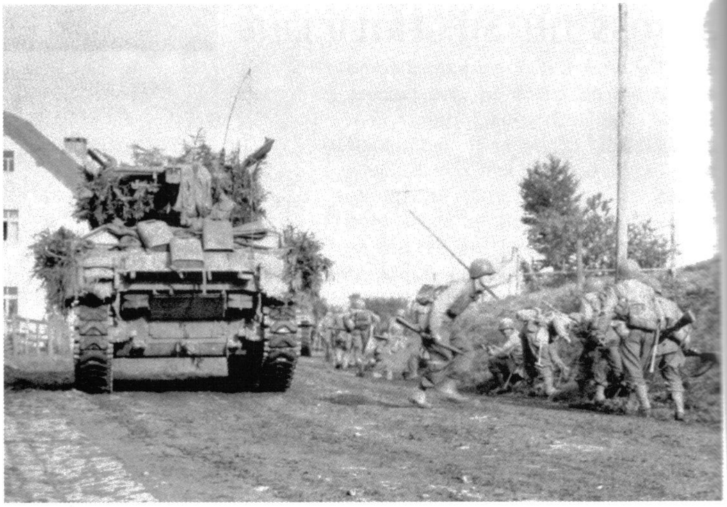


On 13 September 1944, Task Force X of the 3rd Armored Division penetrated the Siegfried line near Roeten Germany, south of Aachen led by a Scorpion flail tank. The unit had found one of the gaps in the defense line designed to permit German troops to pass through that had not been properly sealed up after the retreat. This is a view two days later as one of the unit's M4 dozer tanks moves through the gap in the dragon's teeth.



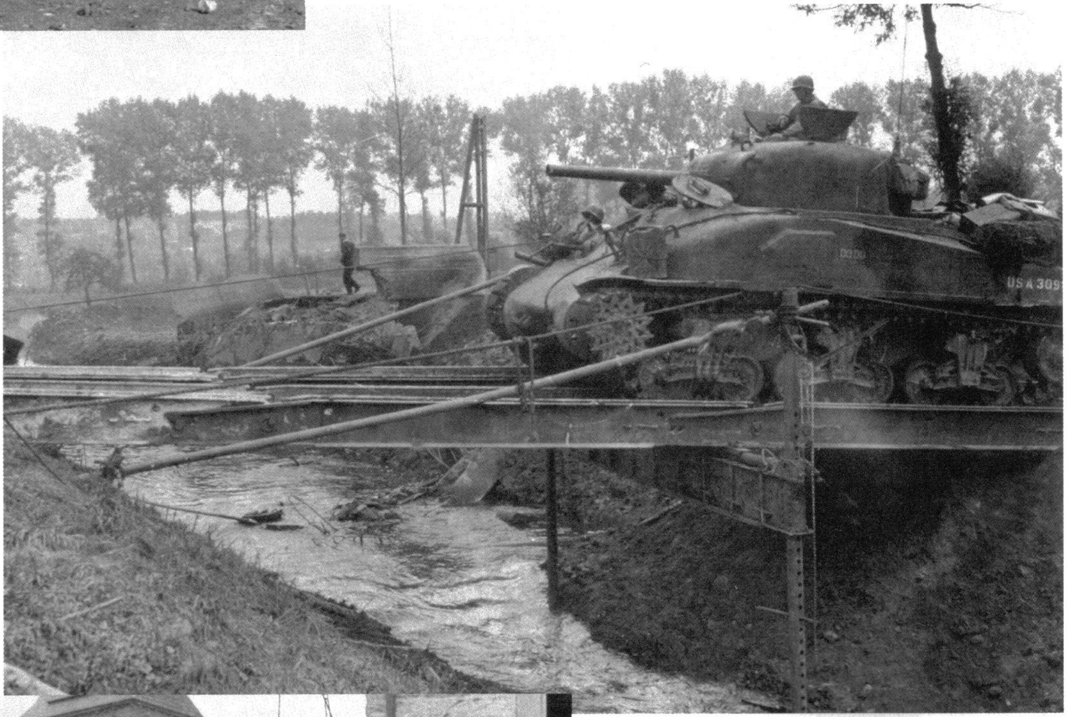
Another view of a 3rd Armored Div. M4 carrying troops of the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment while moving through border defenses near Roeten on 15 September 1944.



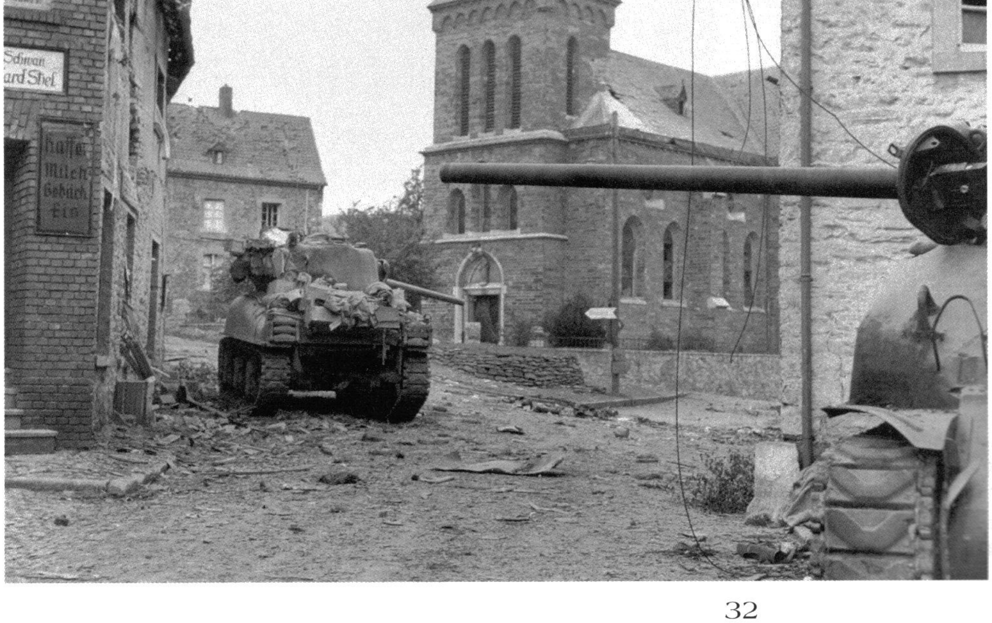


Another view of the same M4 tank of the 735th Tank Battalion inside the town of Roth with GIs from the 8th Infantry Regiment using the local terrain to provide cover from snipers.

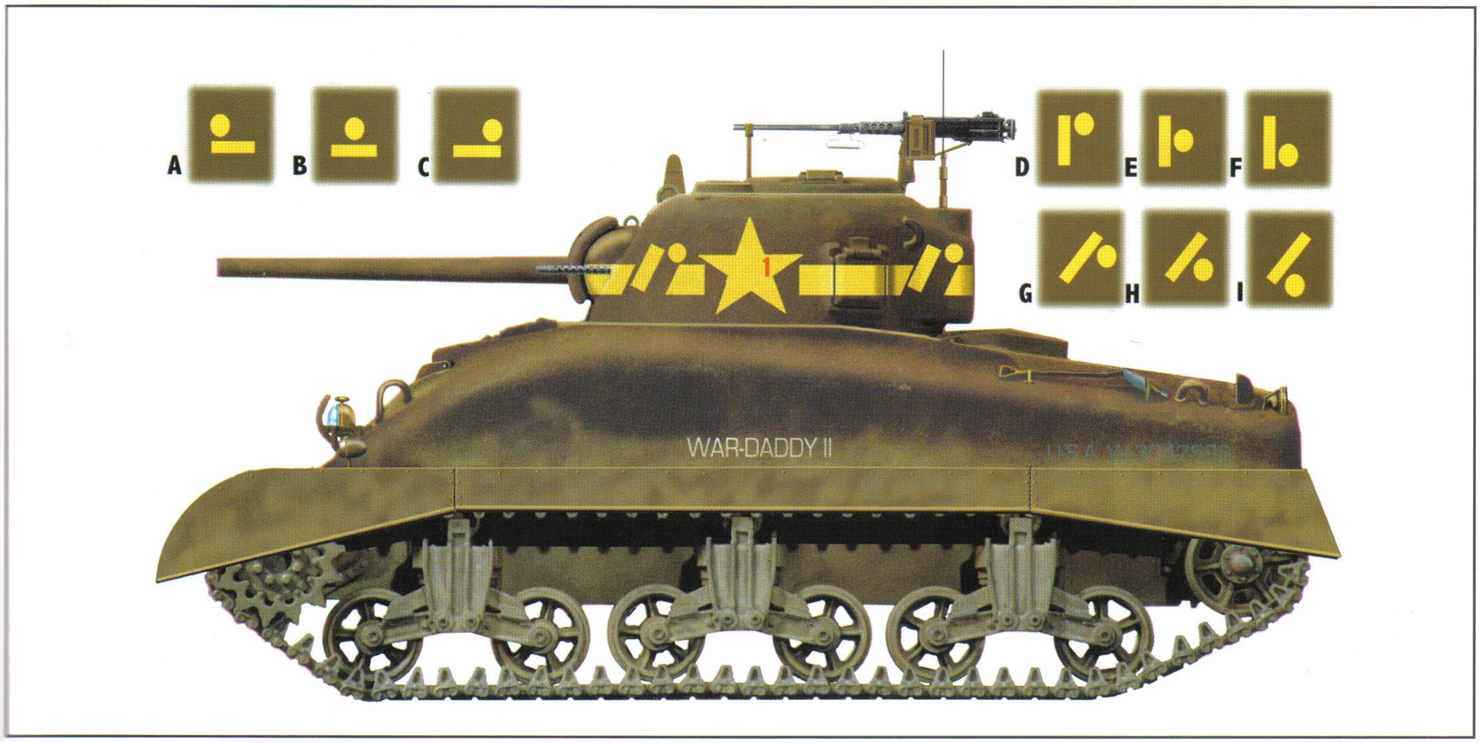
On 15 September after penetrating through the Siegfried line, the 8th Infantry Regiment began a motorized advance on the Schnee Eifel ridgeline. Supported by M4 tanks of the 735th Tank Battalion, the spearhead came under fire near the town of Roth.



A composite hull M4 named "Dodo" of Co. D, 66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. crosses a treadway bridge over a stream during operations along the German frontier.

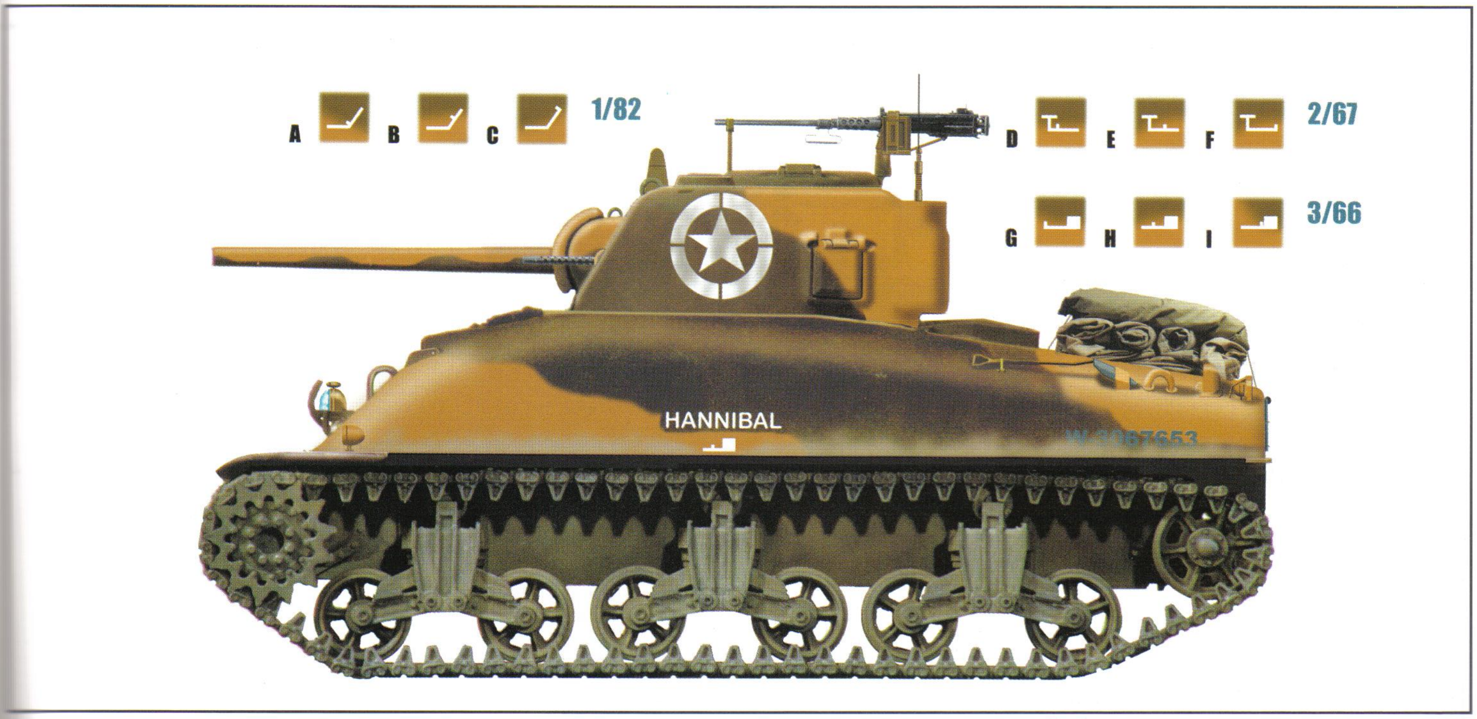


The town of Schevenhuette was the site of intense fighting when the German Seventh Army launched a local counter-attack on 17 September 1944. Tanks of the 3rd Armored Division move through the town on 22 September after the fighting ended in bloody stalemate.



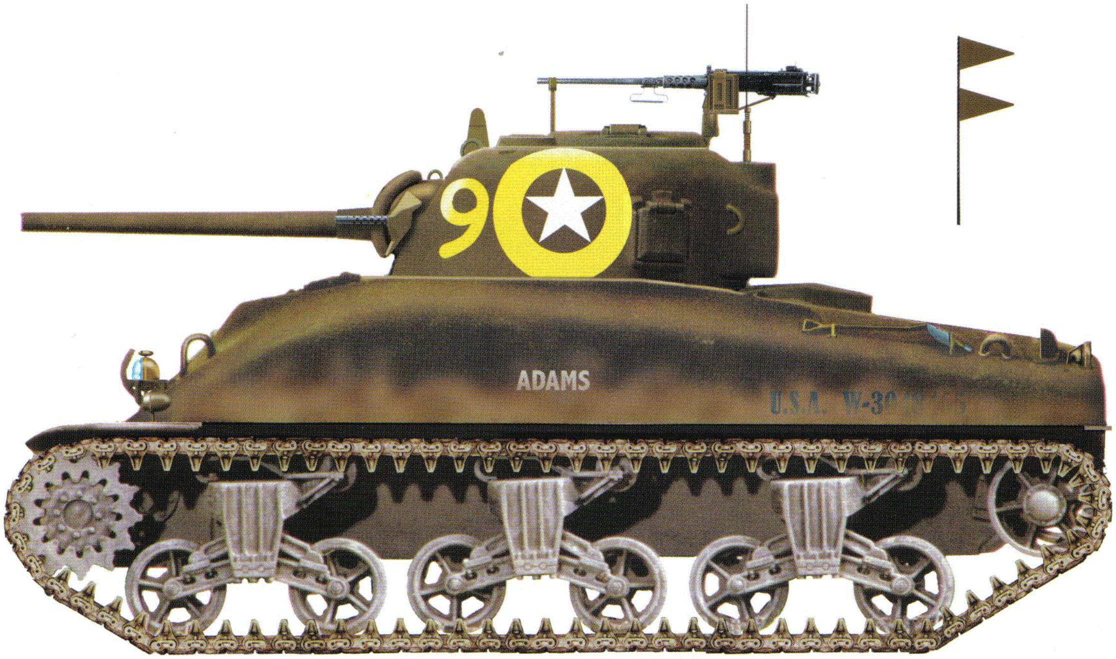
M4A1, Co. G, 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regt., 1st Armored Division, Kasserine Pass, Tunisia, February 1943

This M4A1 shows the markings typical of US tanks in the early fighting in Tunisia. The markings are in yellow which was common Armored Force practice at the time. The division had an elaborate system of company and battalion markings using small geometric symbols. Insignia employing a bar and circle were from 1st Armored Regt. as seen here, those with a bar and square were from the 13th Armored Regt. As shown in the inset illustrations of the 1st Armored Regiment insignia, the three line companies in each battalion shared a common style of bar design, with the company signified by the location of the small circle. So 1st Bn. (Cos. A, B, C) used a horizontal bar, 2nd Bn. (Co. D, E, F) used a vertical bar, and 3rd Bn. (Cos. G, H, I) used an angled bar. Later in the Tunisian fighting, the divisions usually camouflaged the tanks with an improvised paint made from the local mud. This particular tank, "War Daddy II" was captured by the Germans after an ill-fated encounter with Tiger I tanks of I/Pz.Abt. 501 near Sbeitla. The vehicle registration number is in blue drab.



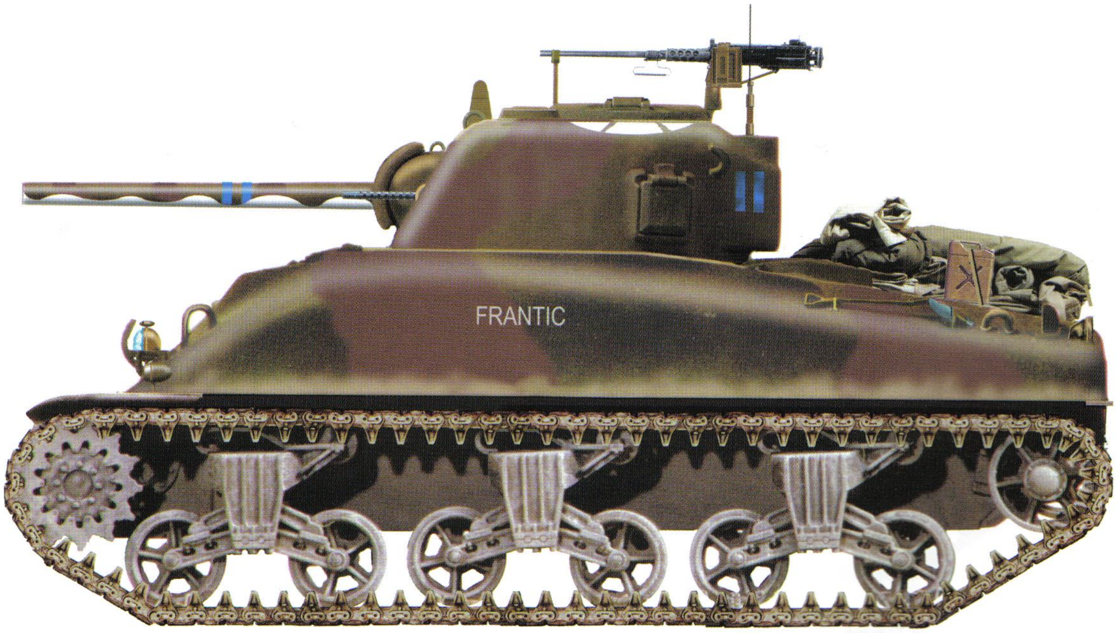
M4A1, Co. H, 66th Armored Regt., 2nd Armored Division, Operation "Husky", Sicily, 1943

Prior to the Sicily invasion, Operational Memo 34 was issued which instructed armored units to camouflage their tanks and other vehicles with a pattern of earth yellow or earth red over the usual olive drab. The 2nd Armored Division generally used earth yellow as seen here. This division had a complicated set of insignia to distinguish their sub-units, first applied during training at Ft. Benning in the US. This was usually carried on the side, and in the center of the bow. Each battalion had a basic insignia, and a small dash was added to the bottom line to distinguish the three line companies in each. The inset drawings show samples from three typical units, the 1st Battalion, 82nd Recon, 2nd Battalion, 67th Armored, and 3rd Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment. Sicily saw the introduction of the "Allied Star", developed after it was found that the US star insignia could be mistaken for a German cross at a distance. This was carried in 20-inch size on the turret side, turret roof, and front transmission housing, and a larger 60-inch star was carried on the engine deck. Another form of identification introduced for Operation "Husky" was the use of a pair of olive drab pennants, carried on the radio aerial. These are illustrated on the following Salerno print.



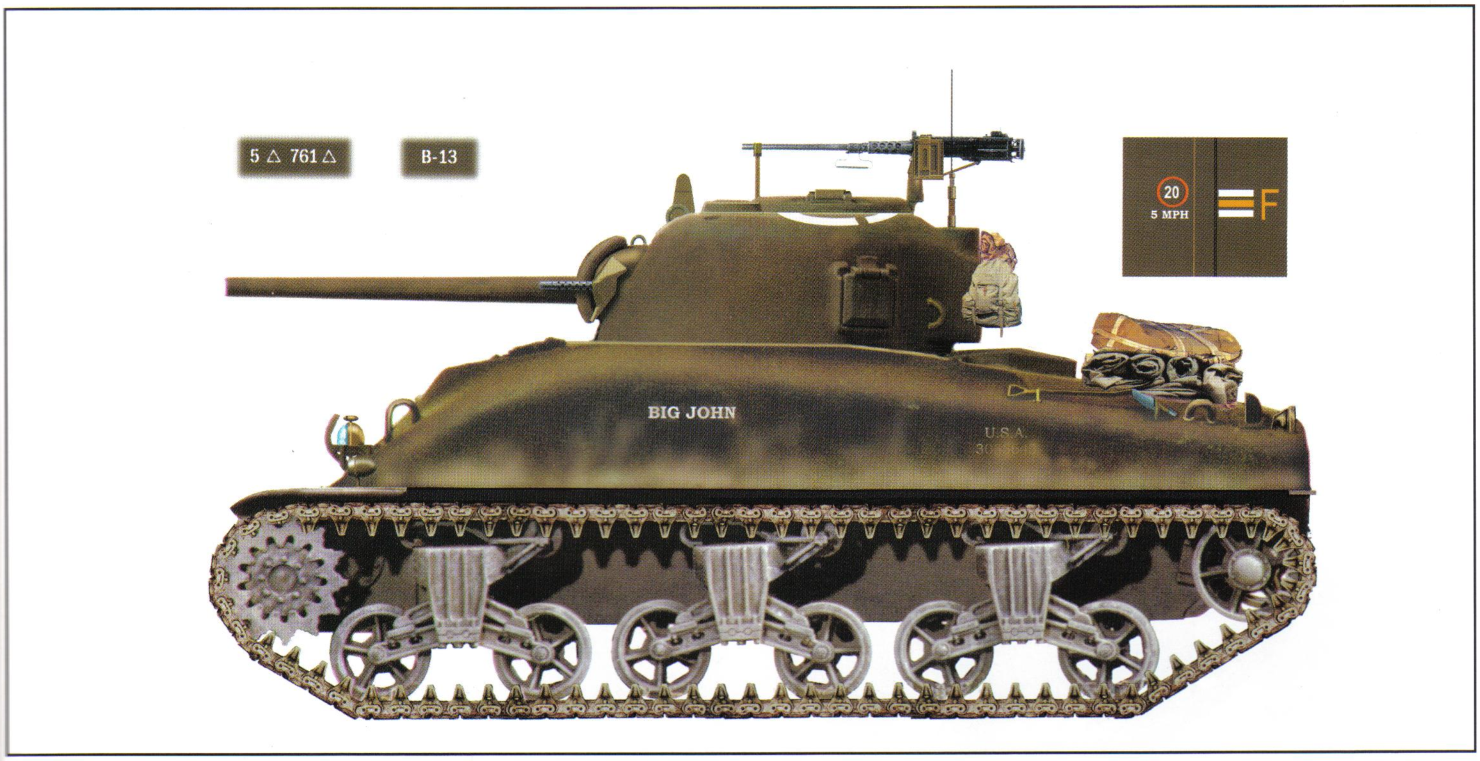
M4A1, Co. A, 191st Tank Battalion, Salerno landings, 9 September 1943

In 1943, the Allied Forces HQ ordered tank units participating in amphibious landings in Italy to add an enlarged white or yellow circle around the white star, and some units took this to an extreme with very thick circles painted in yellow. Some of the tanks of this battalion also had a tactical number painted in yellow on the turret front. The battalion followed the usual practices of naming the tanks starting with the company letter, such as "Aces Up", "Adams", etc. The bumper codes on this vehicle were "5A 181^ A-9". Another form of identification was the use of a pair of olive drab pennants, flown from the top of radio mast. This practice had been started for the landings in Sicily, since it was found that national markings often weren't visible after they became obscured by dust. The same pattern was used in the Salerno landings, with two pennants being flown.



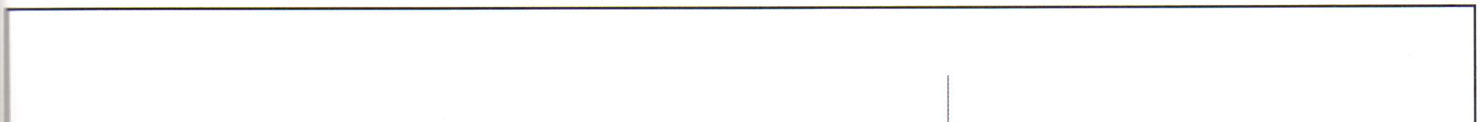
M4A1, Co. F, 13th Armored Regt., 1st Armored Division, Anzio beach-head, Italy, March 1944

By the time of the Anzio landings, the 1st Armored Division had reverted to a simpler system of markings. Each company in a battalion used a color in succession, red, white, and blue. Each platoon carried the appropriate number of vertical stripes, with the headquarters company using a horizontal stripe. So in the case of the 2nd Battalion/13th Armored Regt., D company used red, E company used white and F company (as seen here) used blue. The tank name started in the company letter. This division followed the camouflage patterns suggested in FM-5-20B, adding a pattern of earth red over olive drab, with white counter-shading under the gun barrel, and sometimes under the sponsons. By this time, the 1st Armored Division left the star off prominent positions since they made too clear an aiming point. The circled stars were carried on the turret roof.



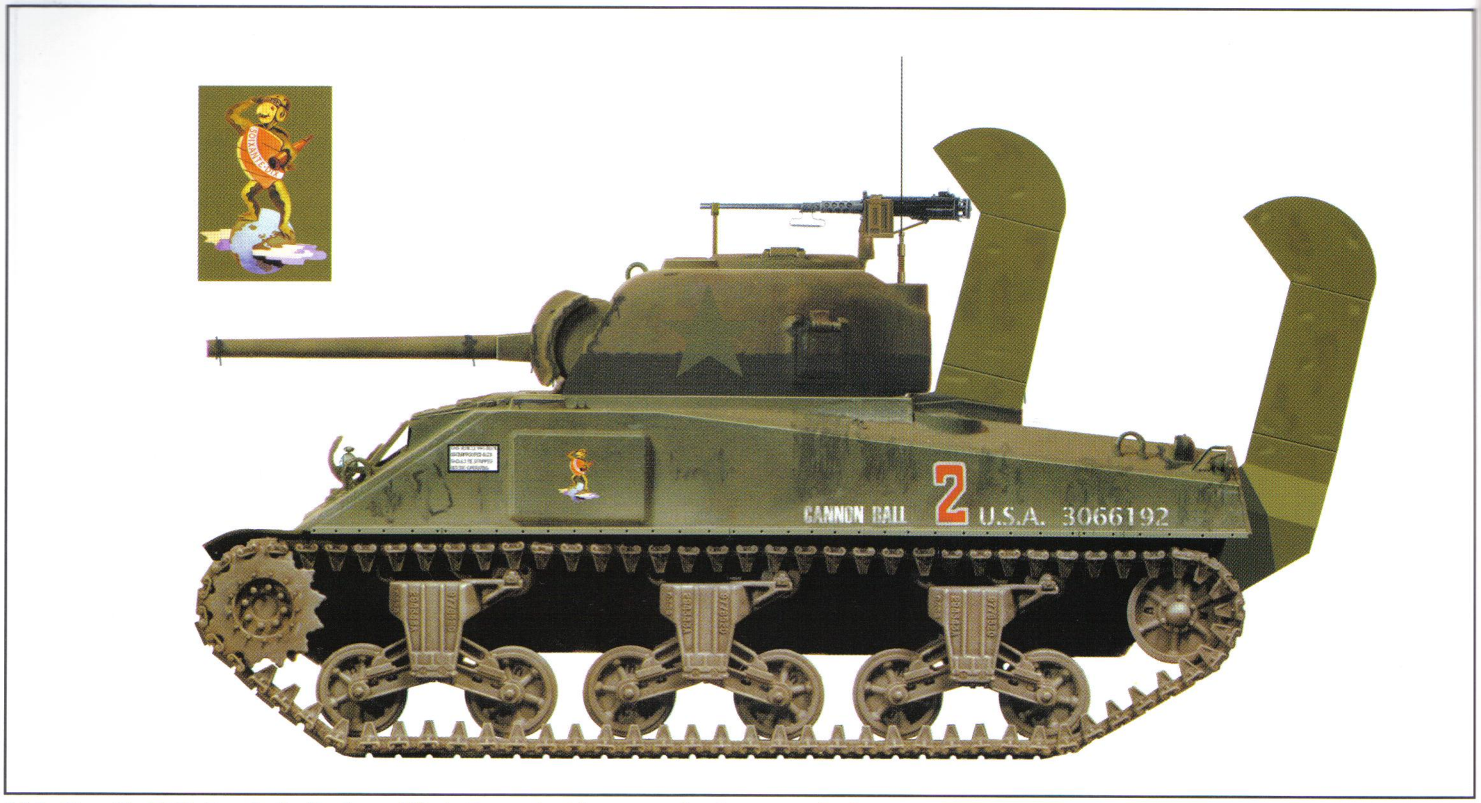
M4A1, Co. B, 760th Tank Battalion, US Fifth Army, Italy, January 1944

This is "Big John", the M4A1 of the commander of Co. B, 740th Tank Battalion. Capt. John Krebs was decorated with the Silver Star for his leadership during the attack on Mt. Porchia on 6 January 1944. Like most of the tanks in the battalion, the markings are fairly simple. The stars have all been painted out. The tanks in B company all used names starting in "B" such as: "Big Bertha", "Bama", "Babe", "Bayu", "Bono", "Berlin and Back", "Berlin or Bust", etc. Most of the tanks still carried the shipping designator marking from embarkation in Italy, which was a pattern of three colored bars and a letter. As shown in the inset drawing, this was carried on the right rear engine access door. It was also carried in the front on the center of the transmission housing. Other markings on the rear door is the old pattern subdued bridging weight symbol, a "20" in a red circle, and a caution marking in white. The tank also carries the usual bumper codes on the front of the hull and the lower lip of the rear hull superstructure, "5A 760^ B-13".



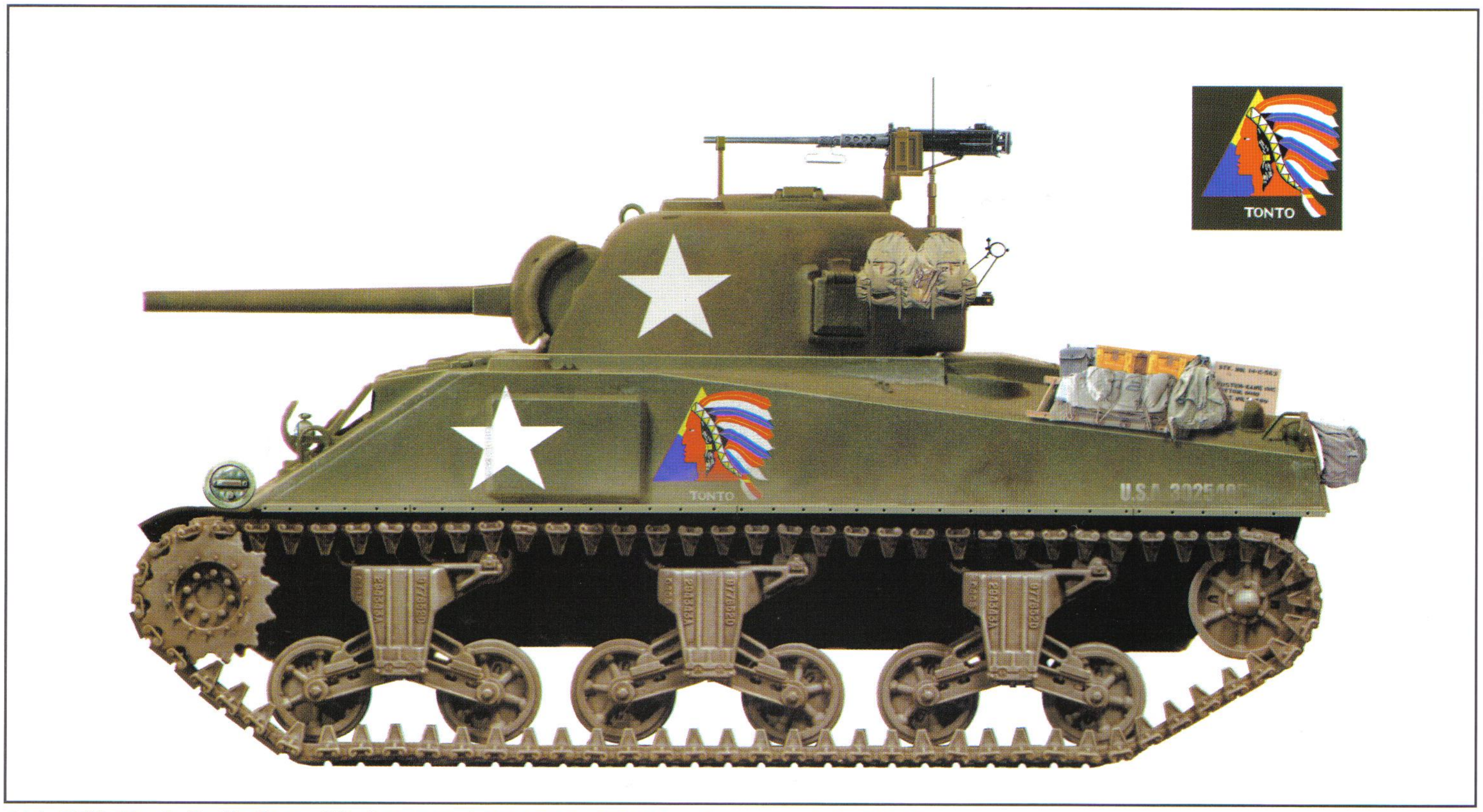
M4, Co. C, 756th Tank Battalion, Monte Cassino, Italy, February 1944

Many tanks in Italy were camouflage painted, often a pattern of earth yellow or earth red over olive drab. After combat experience, many tank battalions painted out or otherwise obscured the large Allied star insignia as it provided too prominent an aiming point and made the tank too easily visible. In this case, the crew appears to have tried to suppress the marking using dirt or engine grease. This battalion used a simple set of tactical marking consisting of a set of bars to indicate the platoon. The tactical numbers were often repeated on the rear of the turret, separated by a small circled Allied star in the fashion of "1*3", etc. The bumper codes on this vehicle were "5A 756^ C-14".



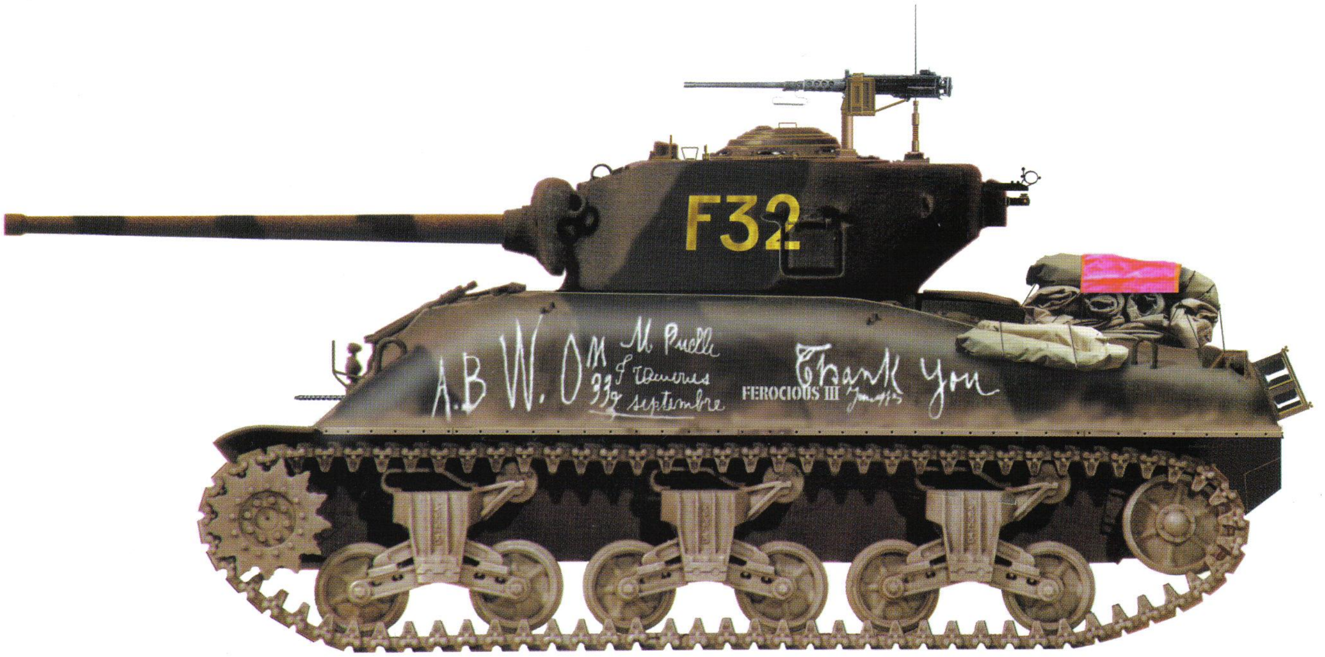
M4, Co. C, 70th Tank Battalion, Utah Beach, Normandy, France, D-Day, 6 June 1944

This M4 took part in the Normandy landings and became bogged down in a sink hole. It is fitted with deep wading trunks which were removed later in the day after the tank was extracted from the hole and put back into action. To make the tank waterproof, canvas sealed with mastic glue was liberally applied over opening including the turret ring and hatches, as can be seen from the dark band around the turret and side shell ejection port. This company later supported the 101st Airborne Div. in the fighting around St. Mere Eglise. While preparing for the invasion in England, the battalion adopted the mascot of "Joe Peckerwood", a cartoon figure of a turtle in a tanker's helmet with a ribbon reading "Soixante-Dix" (Seventy in French) across his chest. This was painted on all the battalion's armored vehicles prior to the landings as a way to distinguish the unit. The 70th Tank Bn. also made use of the practice of painting a large red tactical number on the hull or turret side.



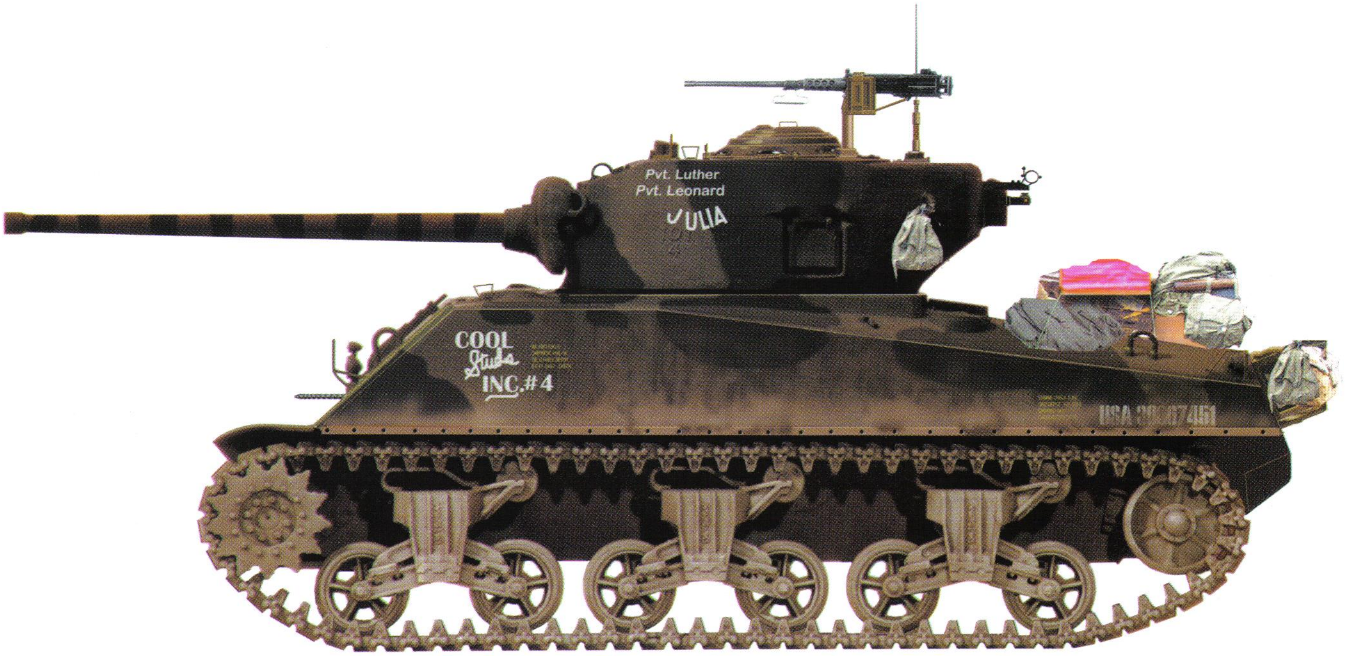
M4, 37th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division, Brittany, France, July 1944

This was the M4 commanded by Captain Bill Dwight, the assistant S3 and battalion liaison officer. Like nearly all of the tanks in the battalion, it had a cartoon painted on the hull side, in this case, the Lone Ranger's side-kick, Tonto from the popular radio show. As in the case of many of the cartoon's, the cartoon was superimposed on the tri-color triangle of the US Armored Force. This tank was knocked out during the fighting near Commercy, but put back into action with Co. B.



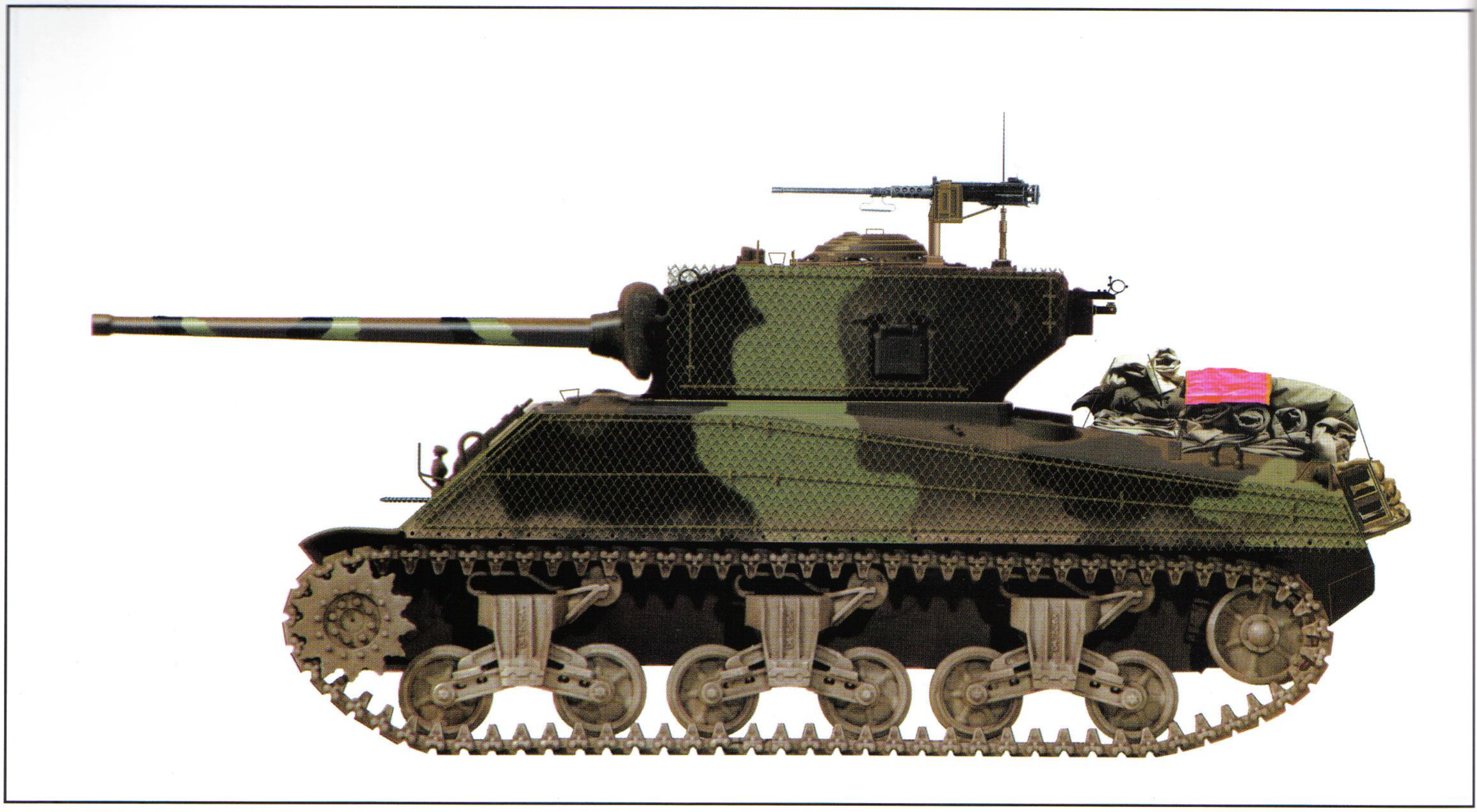
M4A1 (76), Co. F, 33rd Armored Regt., 3rd Armored Division, Belgium, September 1944

The 3rd Armored Division, like the 2nd Armored Division, generally carried tactical numbers on the turret in chrome yellow. In addition, a tank name, beginning with the company letter was standard, in this case, "Ferocious III". On 2 September 1944, CCA of 3rd Armored Division liberated the Belgian town of Mesvin near Mons. The following day, some of the tanks were decorated by the town's people with greetings in white chalk as seen here.



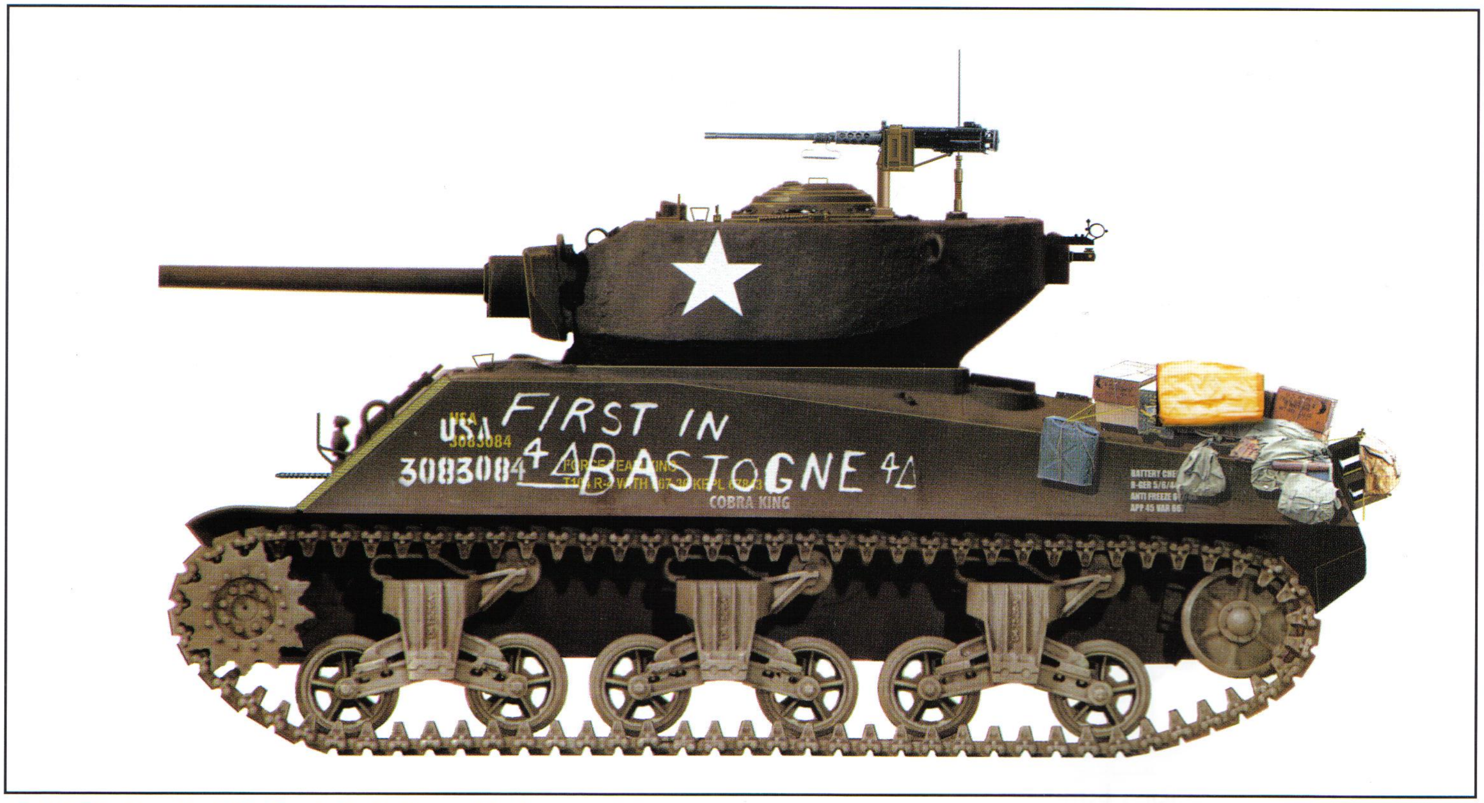
M4A3 (76), Co. C, 761st Tank Battalion (Colored), Task Force Rhine, Germany 1945

This is a tank of the famous "Black Panthers", the best known of the segregated tank battalions. This unit served in the north-west Europe campaign and received the Presidential Unit Citation. This particular tank was commanded by Sgt. Daniel Cardell, and named "Cool Stud Inc." The name came from the company mascot, a rooster, that was carried by the crew. This was Cardell's fourth tank, the other three having been lost in action. The turret carries the name of Cardell's wife. There are two lines above it which appear to be crew member names, the gunner Pvt. Luther Goffe, and Pvt. Leonard Smith, loader. The driver and co-driver T5 Horace Clark and T4 Linson Ball, were painted in small letters on the glacis plate in front of their hatches. At the time, this tank was fitted with metal grouser tracks with duck-bill extenders.



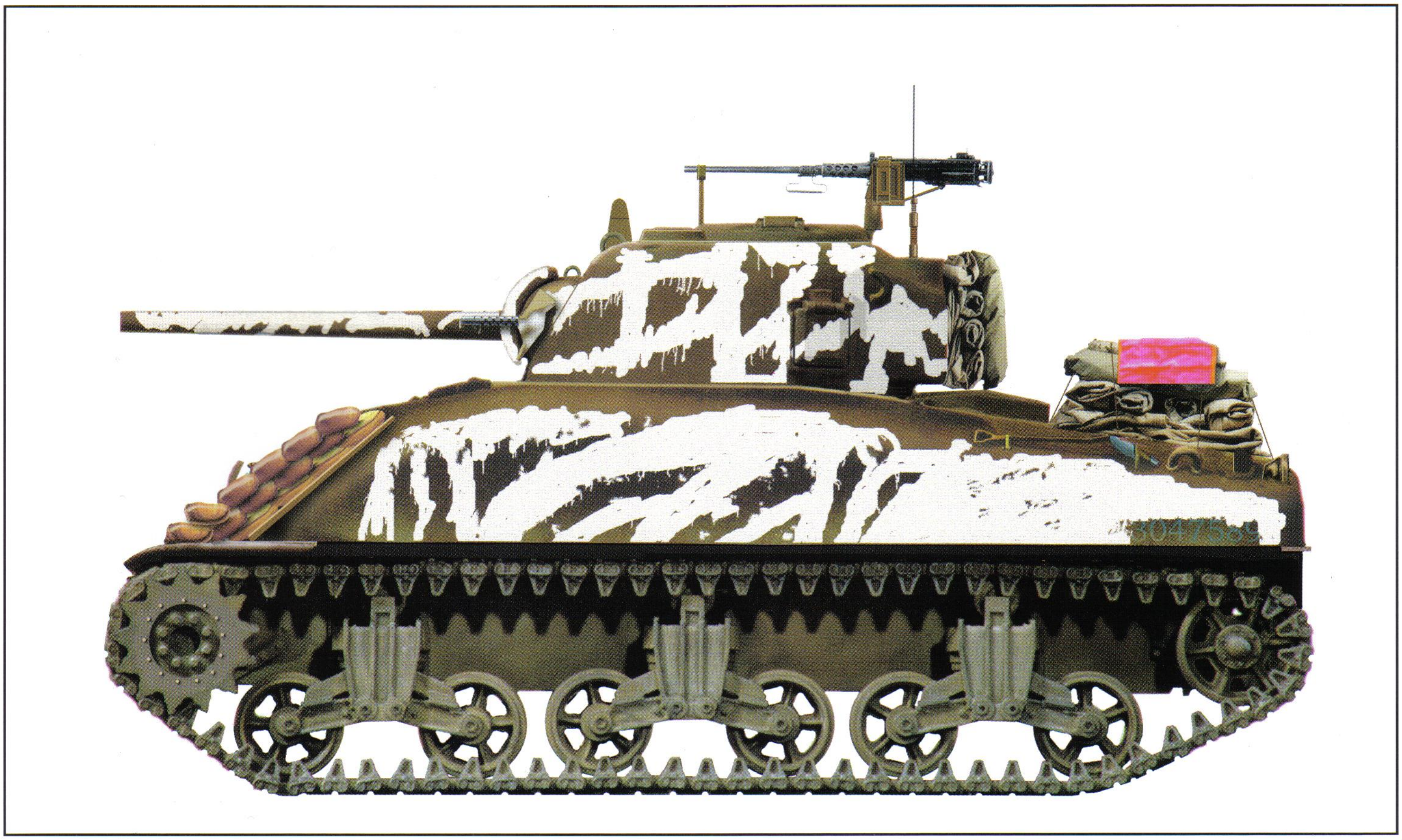
M4A3 (76), 19th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, Belgium, November 1944

Starting in November 1944, the 602nd Camouflage Engineer Battalion began a systematic process of camouflaging tanks in the 12th Army Group. First, the tanks were camouflage painted. This usually consisted of black over the usual olive drab, but on some occasions when additional paint was available, a third color was used as is seen with the light green pattern here. After this was done, a set of steel rods were welded to the hull front and side, and the turret sides, to which was attached Sommerfield matting, a type of screening. The screen was intended to make it easier for the crew to attach tree branches for camouflage. By this stage of the war, many battalions completely painted over any national insignia.



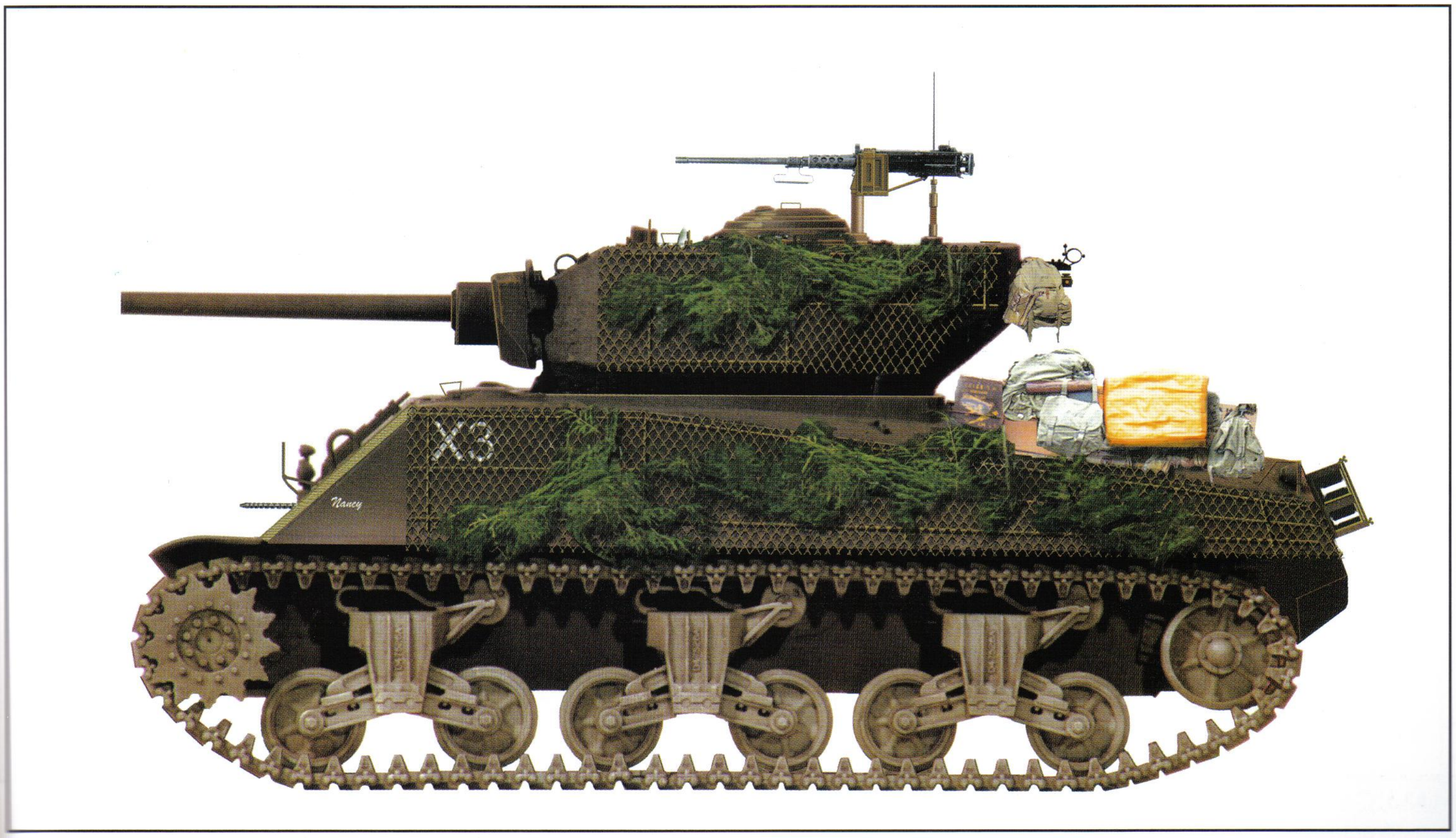
M4A3E2, Co. C, 37th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division, Bastogne, Belgium, December 1944

This is the Jumbo assault tank commanded by Lt. Charles P. Boggess which led the spearhead of Patton's Third Army in the counter-attack to relieve Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. The slogan "First in Bastogne" was chalked on the sides after the task force reached Bastogne on 26 December 1944. The markings are otherwise simple, including the tank name "Cobra King", the vehicle registration number, and various shipping stencils. The 37th Tank Battalion continued to use the white star long after most other battalions had painted it over. This tank was fitted with rubber chevron tracks and duck-bill extenders.



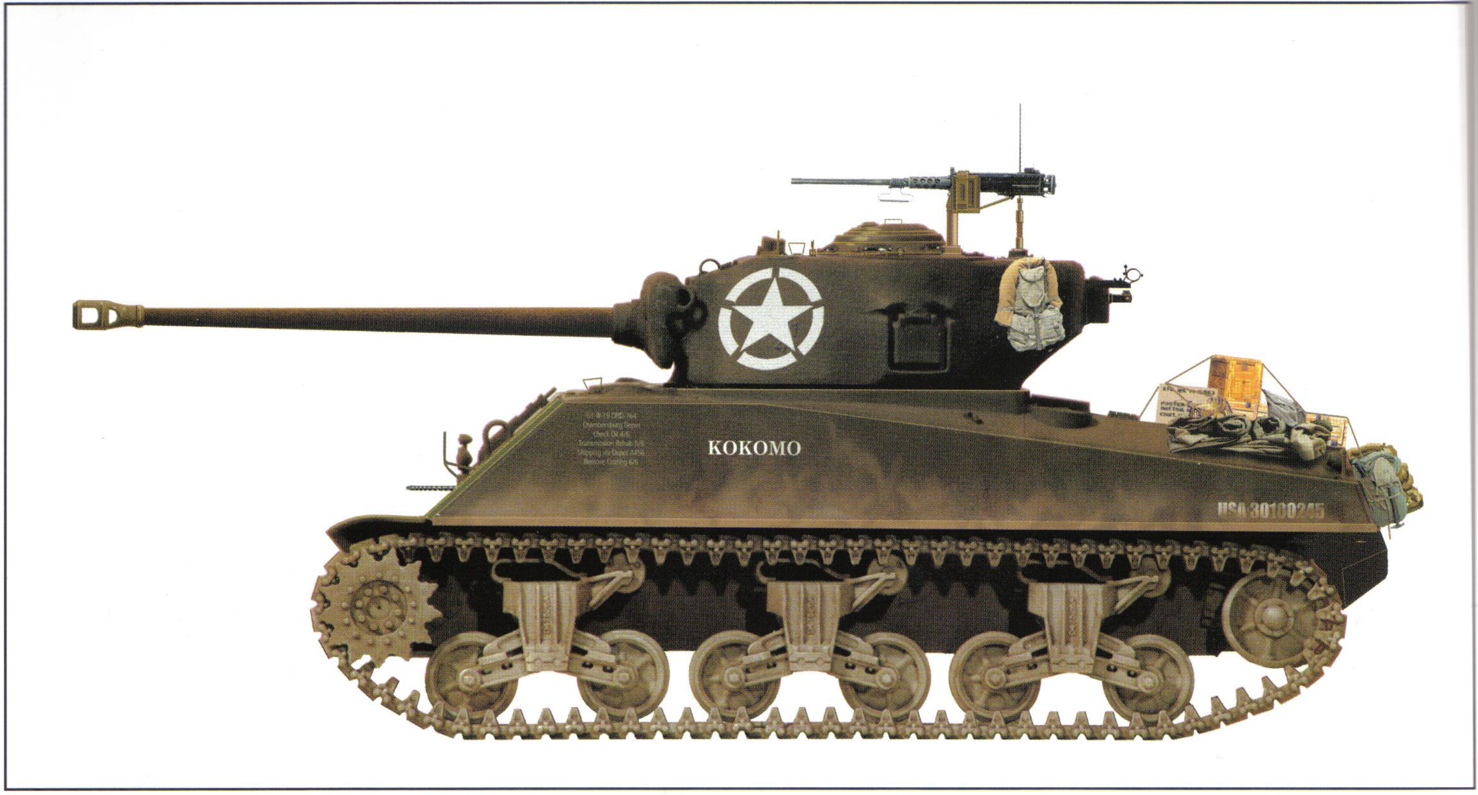
M4A1, 709th Tank Battalion, 75th Infantry Division, Colmar, France, February 1945

This old M4A1 was one of the tanks taking part in the counter-attack against the German Operation "Nordwind" offensive in Alsace in January 1945. Most of the US and French tanks during this campaign were painted with white-wash winter camouflage, often quite hastily applied as is the case here. The old vehicle registration number in blue drab is barely visible on the rear side.



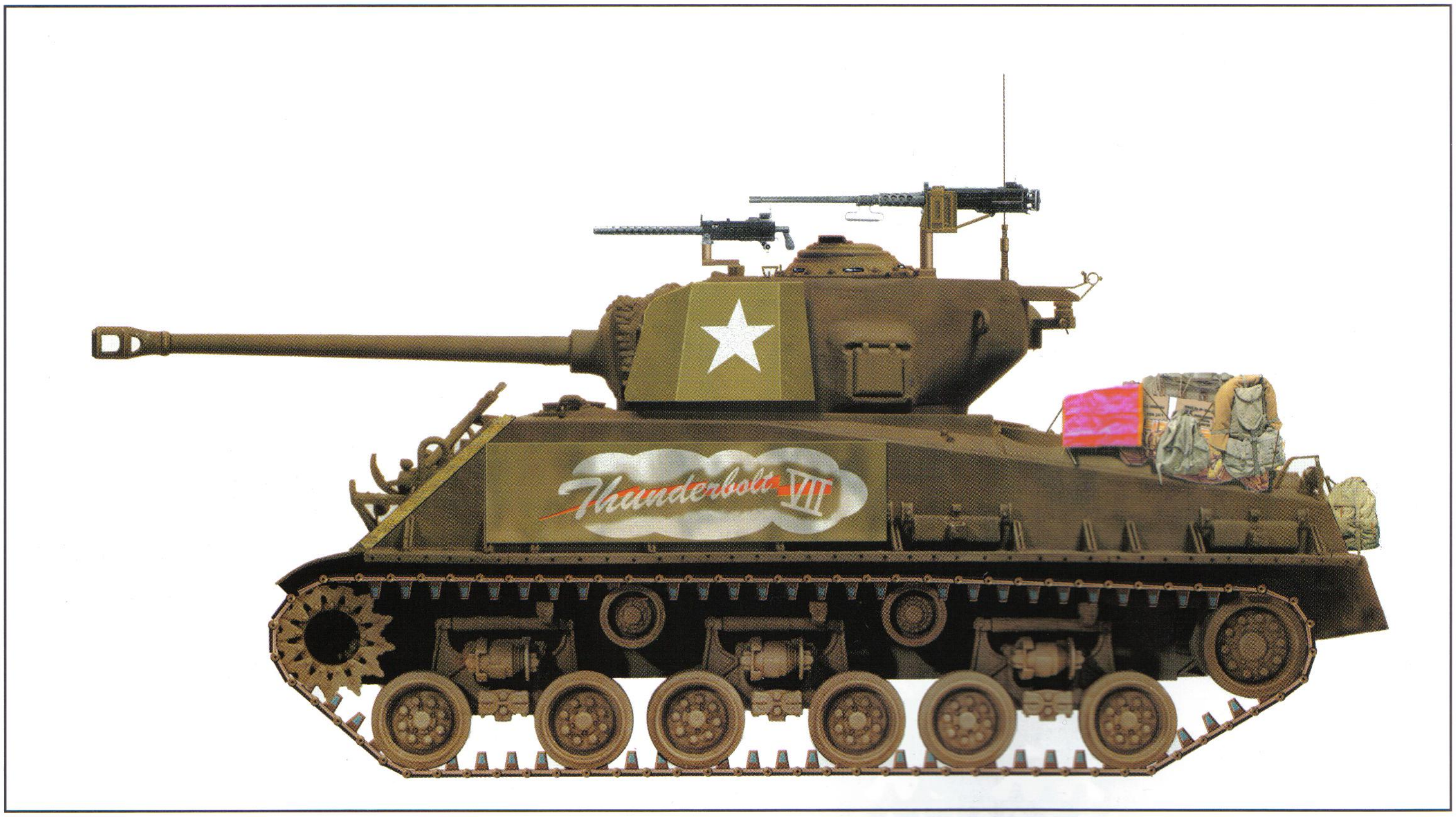
M4A3E2, 756th Tank Battalion, 31st Infantry Division, Ostheim, Alsace, France, January 1945

This Jumbo took part in the counterattacks by the US Seventh Army against German forces in Alsace following the failed German Operation "Nordwind" offensive. The markings are simple, and consist of the tactical number "X3" on the hull side, and a small name painted lower on the side. This shows the use of the standardized system for welding Sommerfield matting to the hull and turret for the attachment of foliage, in this case, pine boughs.



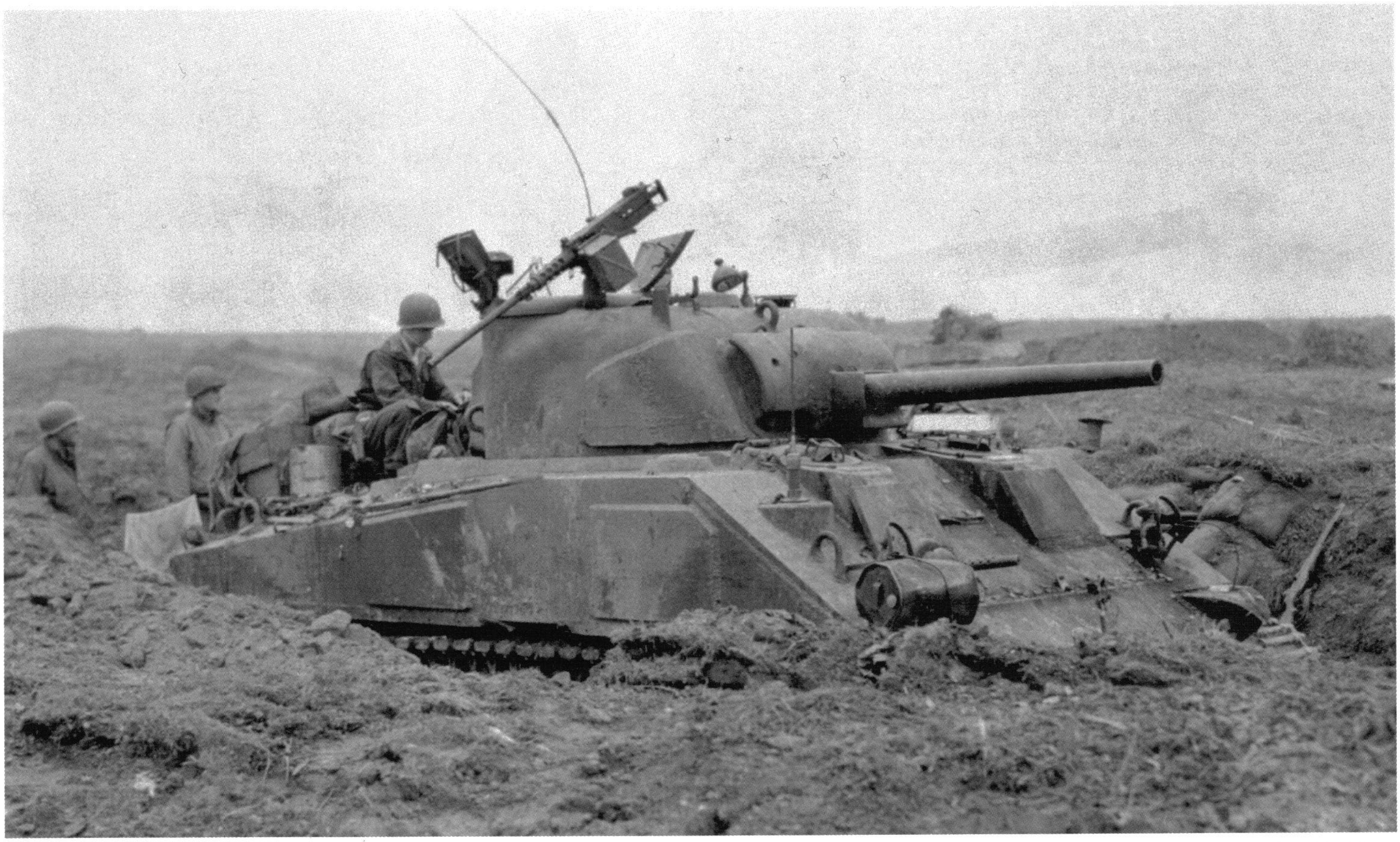
M4A3 (76), 760th Tank Battalion, US Fifth Army, Italy 1945

This is "Kokomo" the M4A3(76) command tank of the 760th Tank Battalion during the fighting in northern Italy in January 1945. The battalion began receiving M4A3 tanks with the 76mm gun in the autumn of 1944. Since US infantry was more familiar with the short-barreled 75mm tanks, the battalion usually marked the new tanks prominently with white stars to avoid confusion with long-barreled German tanks. In 1945, it was operated by Major C. S. "Trim" Curtis when he took over command of the battalion in December 1944. Command tanks and other specialized vehicles in the battalion did not follow the practice of using the first letter of the company in the name.

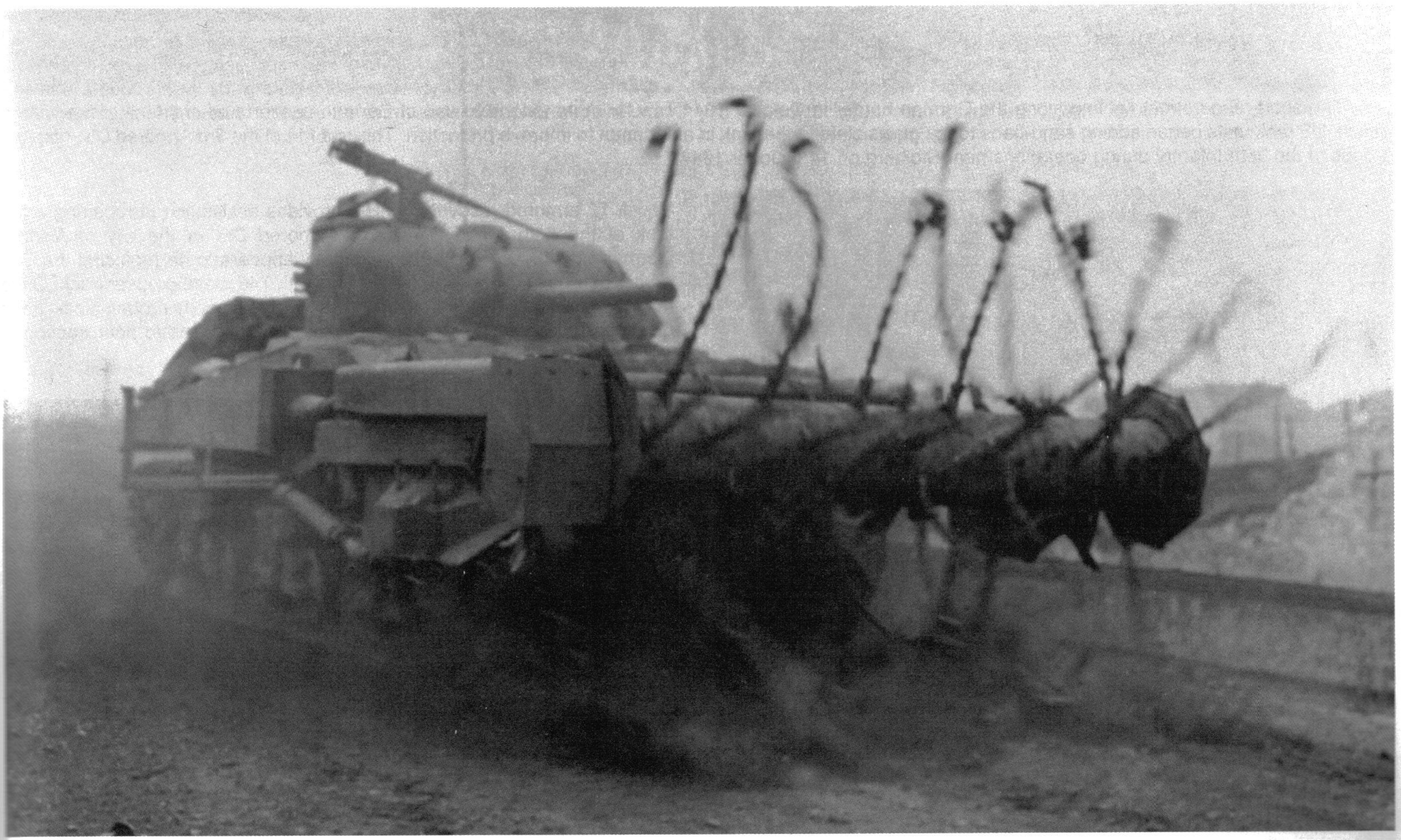


M4A3E8, CCA, 4th Armored Division, Germany, February 1945

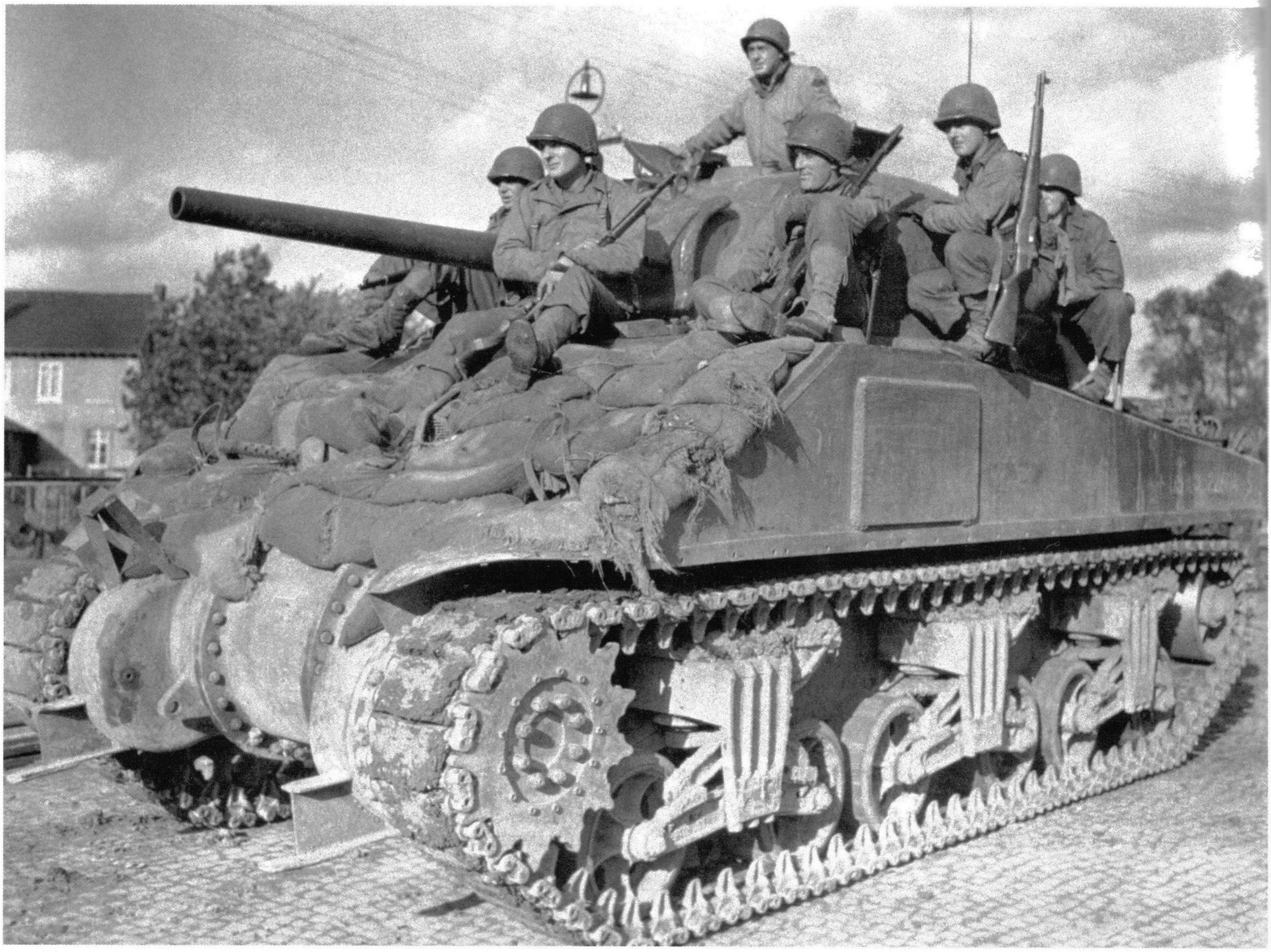
This is the command tank of Col. Creighton Abrams, who by this time had been transferred from command of the 37th Tank Battalion to head the division's Combat Command A. Abrams was one of the most successful US tank commanders of World War II, and the current M1 tank is named in his honor. His tanks since training in Britain had been named "Thunderbolt", and this was his seventh tank, the others having been lost in combat or having been worn out. The tank has been fitted with applique armor on the glacis plate, turret front, and hull sides, as became a standard practice in Patton's Third Army after the Battle of the Bulge.



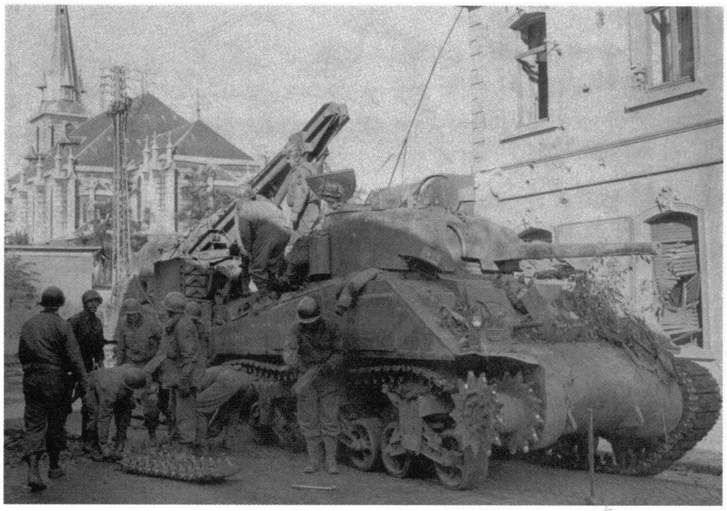
A M4 tank of the 3/67th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. stands guard in an entrenchment on 10 October 1944. Having fought through the Siegfried line, the front turned into a stalemate by early October. This M4 is of the later production type with the M34A1 gun mount, and a full set of hull and turret applique armor. The attachment of a spare 10 gallon oil can on the right fender was common practice in some tank units in 1944. By October, the practice of applying bands of black over the tank's olive drab finish had become standard practice in the First Army and can be seen here.



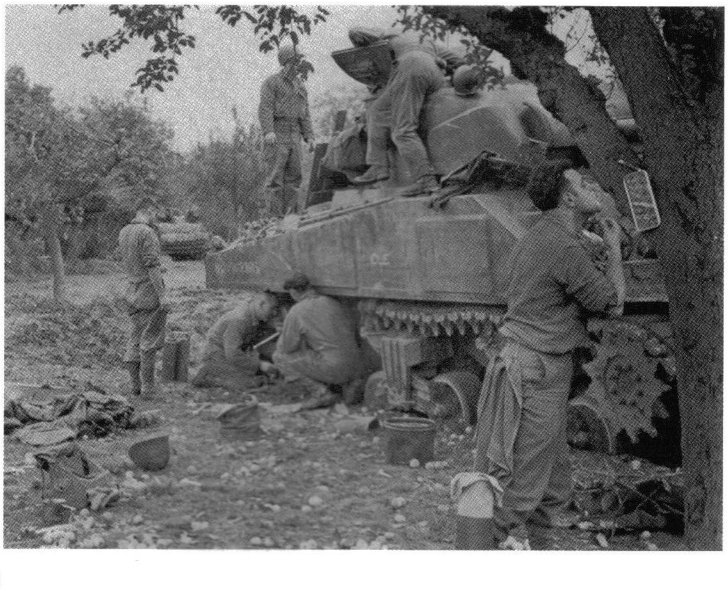
Due to shortages of US minefield breaching equipment, the US Army obtained small numbers of Crab flails from the British. They were first used by a platoon of the 747th Tank Battalion during Operation "Cobra" in July 1944. Due to the small number available, the US Army frequently requested the assistance of the British 79th Armoured Div. to provide flail tank support, and this Crab is in use near Breinig, Germany on 11 October 1944.



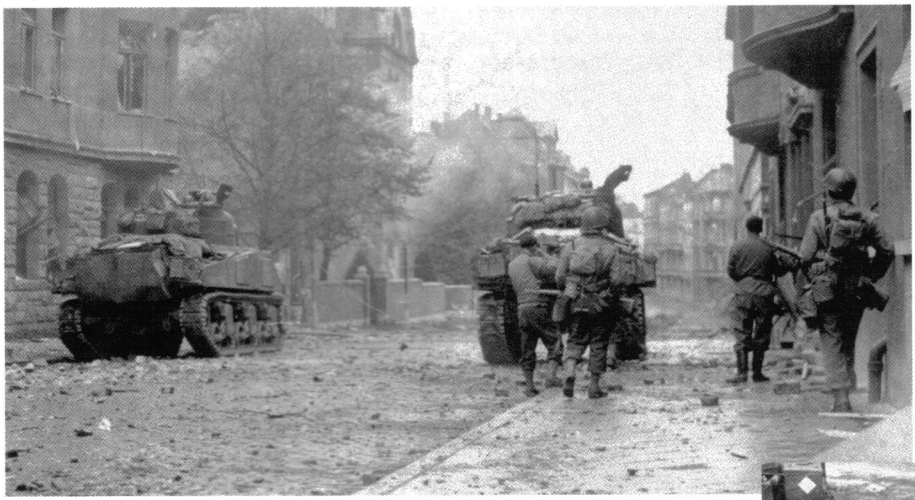
The short-range street fighting along the German border in October 1944 saw far more extensive use of German panzerfaust anti-tank rockets. As a result, US tank units began adding sand-bags to the glacis plate of the tank in an attempt to improve protection. This is a M4 of the 3rd Armored Div. carrying troops of the 36th Infantry during operations near Stolberg on 14 October 1944.



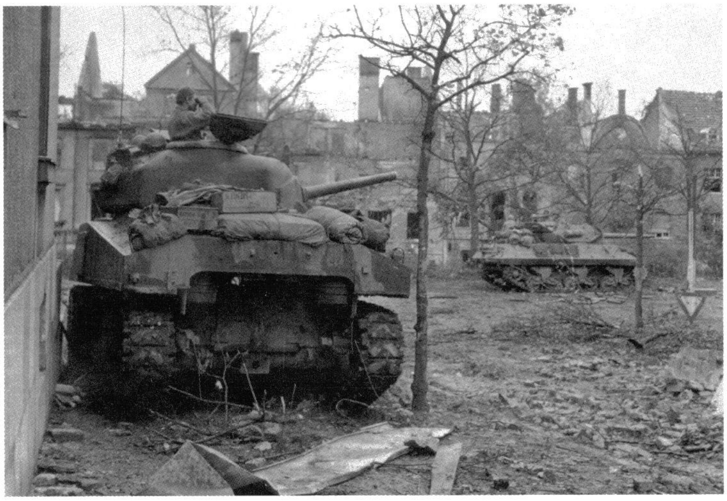
A T2 armored recovery vehicle provides assistance in repairing a M4 tank of the 66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. in the city of Alsdorf, Germany on 15 October 1944. The crew appears to be replacing the T51 rubber block tracks seen on the left side with T49 metal grouser track. Once the wet autumn weather arrived in 1944, the smooth rubber block track developed a reputation as "suicide track" since it provided poor traction in the mud.



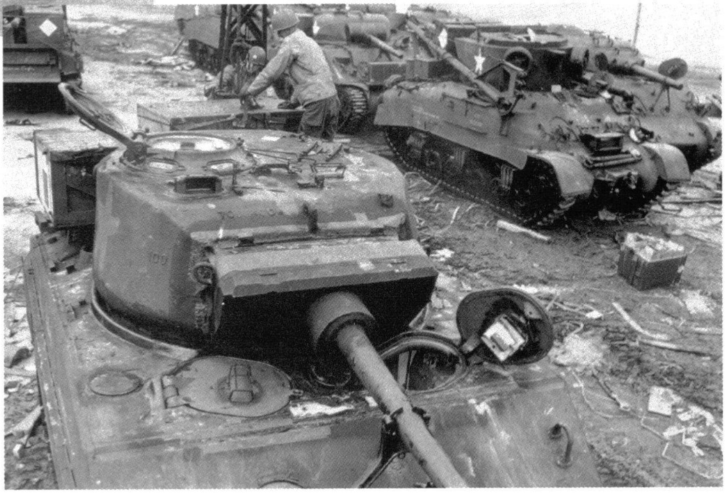
The crew of "Idle" from 3/66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. do their daily chores in the outskirts of Alsdorf, Germany on 15 October 1944. While some of the crew do suspension repair, one of the crewman shaves.



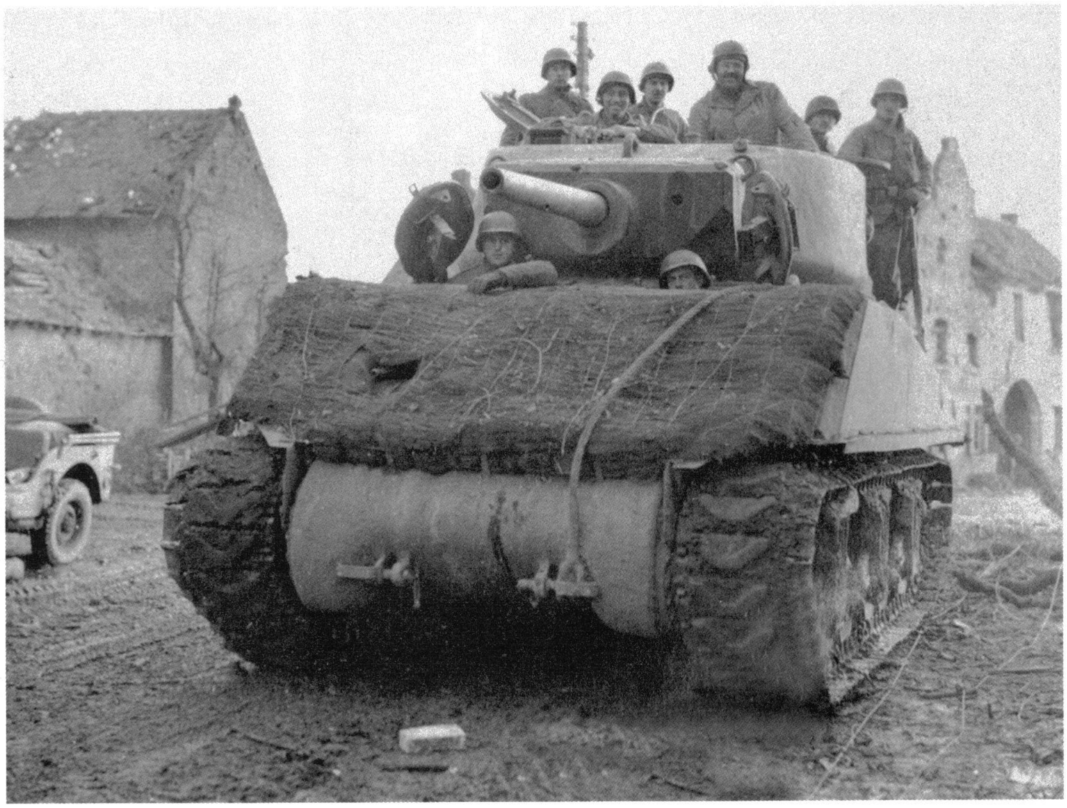
The first major German city to come under attack on the western front was Aachen, starting on 11 October 1944. A counterattack by the 3rd Panzer Gren. Div. on 15 October is met here by elements of the 26th Infantry Regt., 1st Infantry Div., supported by M4 tanks of the 745th Tank Battalion. The M4 on the left is still fitted with its wading trunk from the landing in Normandy.



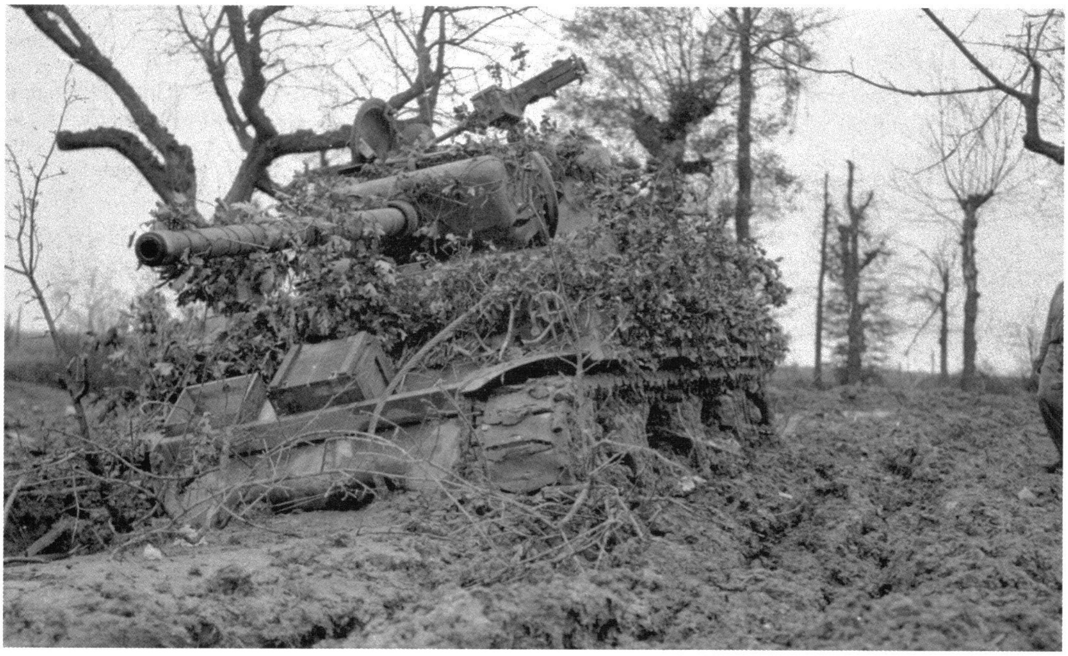
The fighting in Aachen was intense and costly. Here an M4 provides overwatch as a M10 tank destroyer moves forward on 20 October. The German troops finally surrendered the next day when a M12 155mm gun motor carriage was used to reduce the commander's bunker at point blank range.



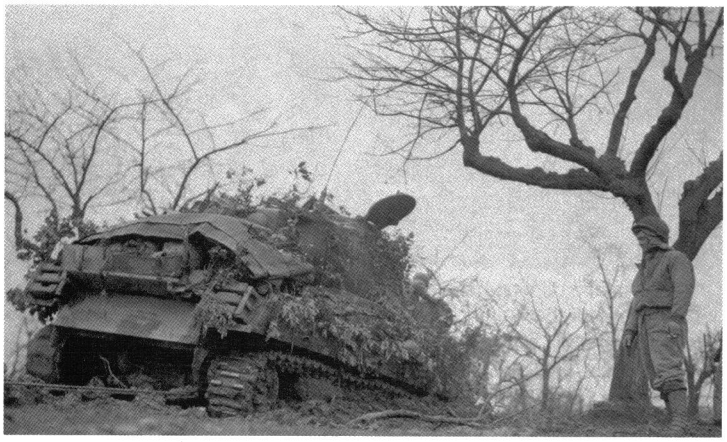
The intense fighting along the Siegfried line and in Aachen convinced the US Army of the need for a more heavily armored tank to provide close support. A solution was already in the works since February 1944 in the form of the M4A3E2 "Jumbo". This tank had the same 75mm gun as the normal M4, but had thicker armor on the turret and hull. This is a Jumbo in one of the ordnance yards in France on 4 November 1944 being prepared after shipment for issuance to a tank unit. It provides a good view of the new turret and the thick gun mantlet.



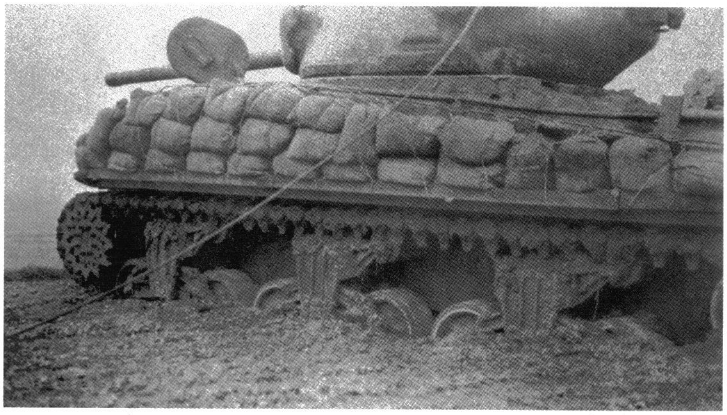
A good example of the Jumbo in service. This is a M4A3E2 of the 743rd Tank Bn., supporting the 30th Infantry Division near Altdorf, Germany on 27 November 1944. It has been reinforced with additional sand-bag armor on the glacis plate, which was then covered with camouflage netting.



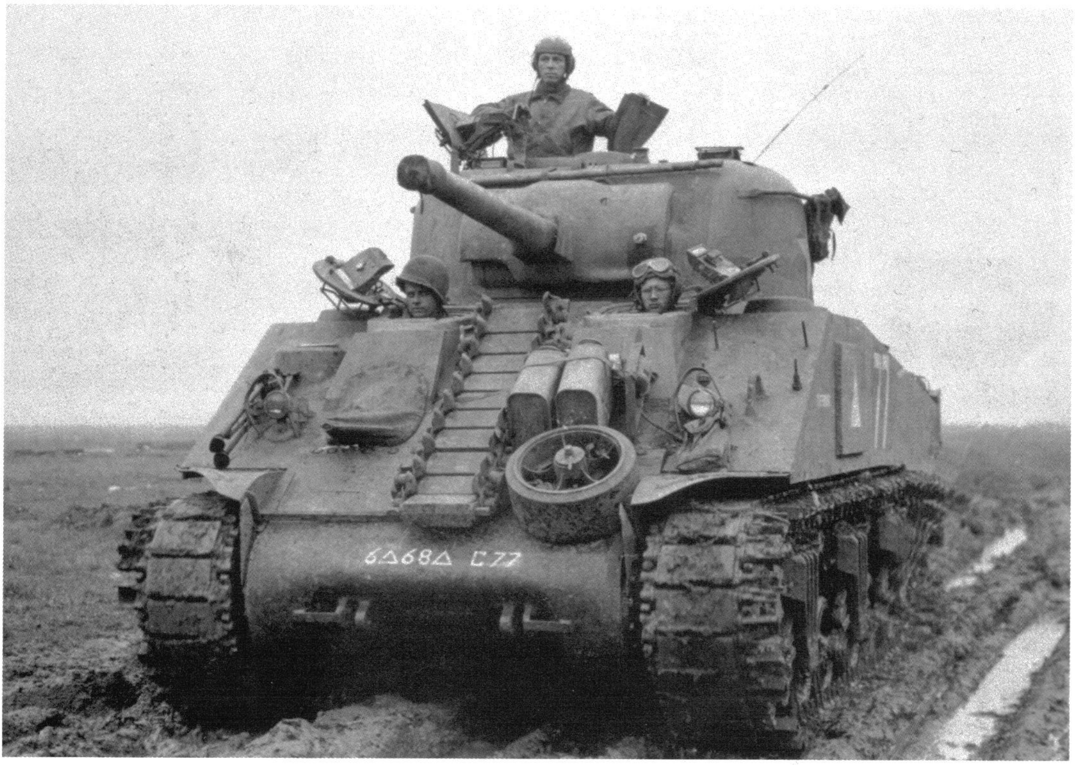
One of the main problems facing tank crew in the autumn of 1944 was the poor mobility of the M4 in muddy conditions. This new M4A3 (76) has completely bogged down in the mud while supporting the 84th Division during fighting in Germany on 24 November 1944.



This rear view of the same M4A3 (76) tank shows that it is fitted with the T49 metal grouser tracks, one of the better solutions for muddy conditions compared to the rubber block track but still far from perfect.

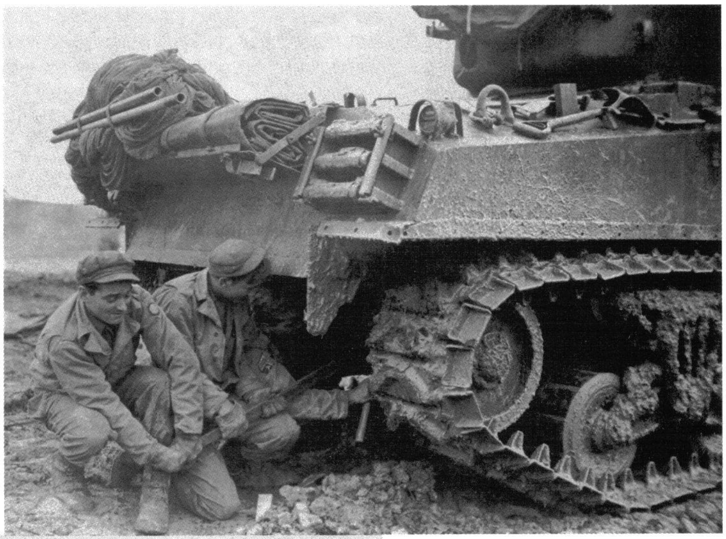


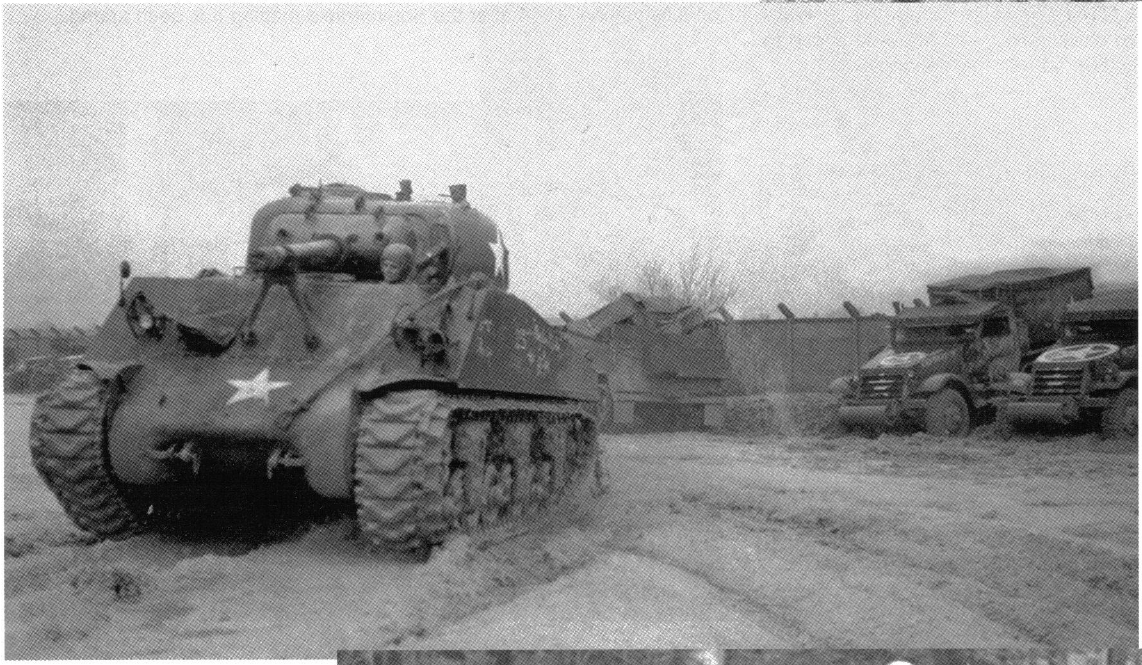
The M4's floatation problem in mud became even worse after the troops began adding improvised sand-bag armor on the hull front and hull sides. This is a M4A3 (76) of the 743rd Tank Bn. near Eschweiler, Germany in November 1944.



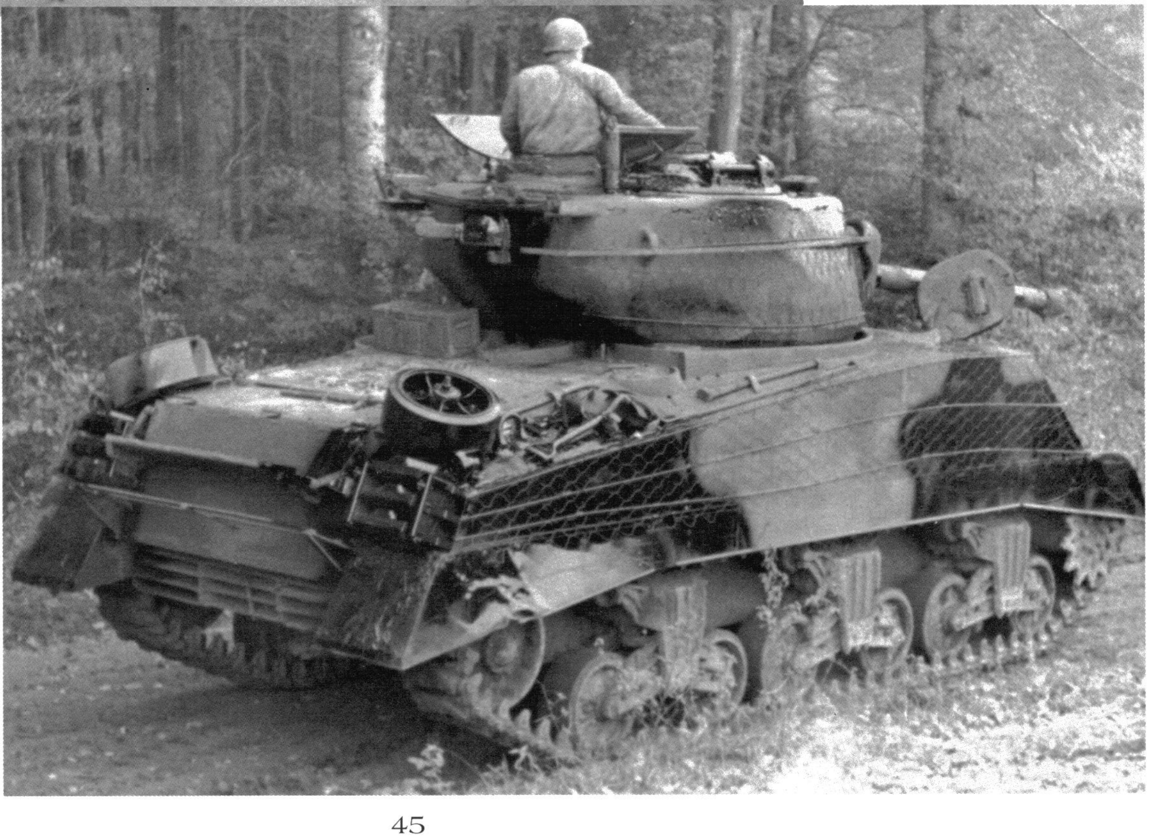
The solution to the floatation problem was to attach extenders to the track end connectors, and these can be seen on this tank from C/69th Tank Bn, 6th Armored Div. These were given various nicknames by the troops such as "duck bills" or "duck feet".

Troops from the 531st Heavy Maintenance (Tanks) Co. tighten the track tension on a M4A3 (105) at the maintenance yard in Etain France on 27 November 1944. They have just added duck-bill extenders to the track.

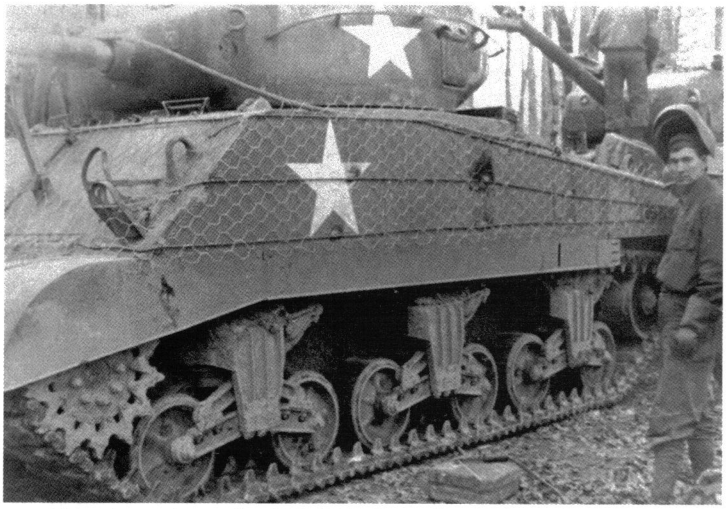




The crew of a new M4A3 (105) assault gun shown above try out the new duck bill extenders in the yard at the Etain tank depot in November 1944.



Another problem that was addressed in the autumn of 1944 was the poor camouflage discipline of US tank crews. The First Army decided that the best solution would be for specialized engineer troops to take care of the matter. As a result, starting in October, the 602nd Engineer Camouflage Battalion developed a standardized method for applying camouflage paint to the tanks, and adding a layer of Sommerfield matting over the main surfaces for the attachment of foliage. Entire tank battalions were painted during refits. The usual camouflage was black over olive drab, but some units had other colors added if paint was available.



This photo shows the 602nd Engineer Camouflage Battalion welding Sommerfield matting to the side of a M4A3 (76). Surprisingly, this tank still has sand shields fitted. There was an official policy in 12th Army Group to have sand-shields removed as they interfered with maintenance.

BUCKS
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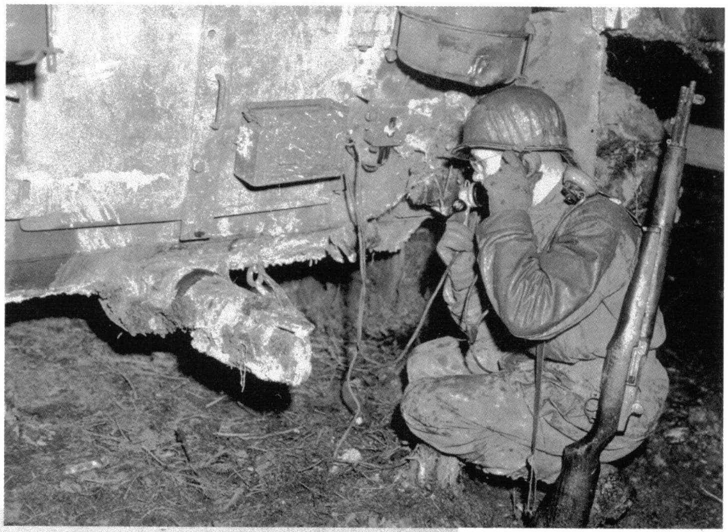
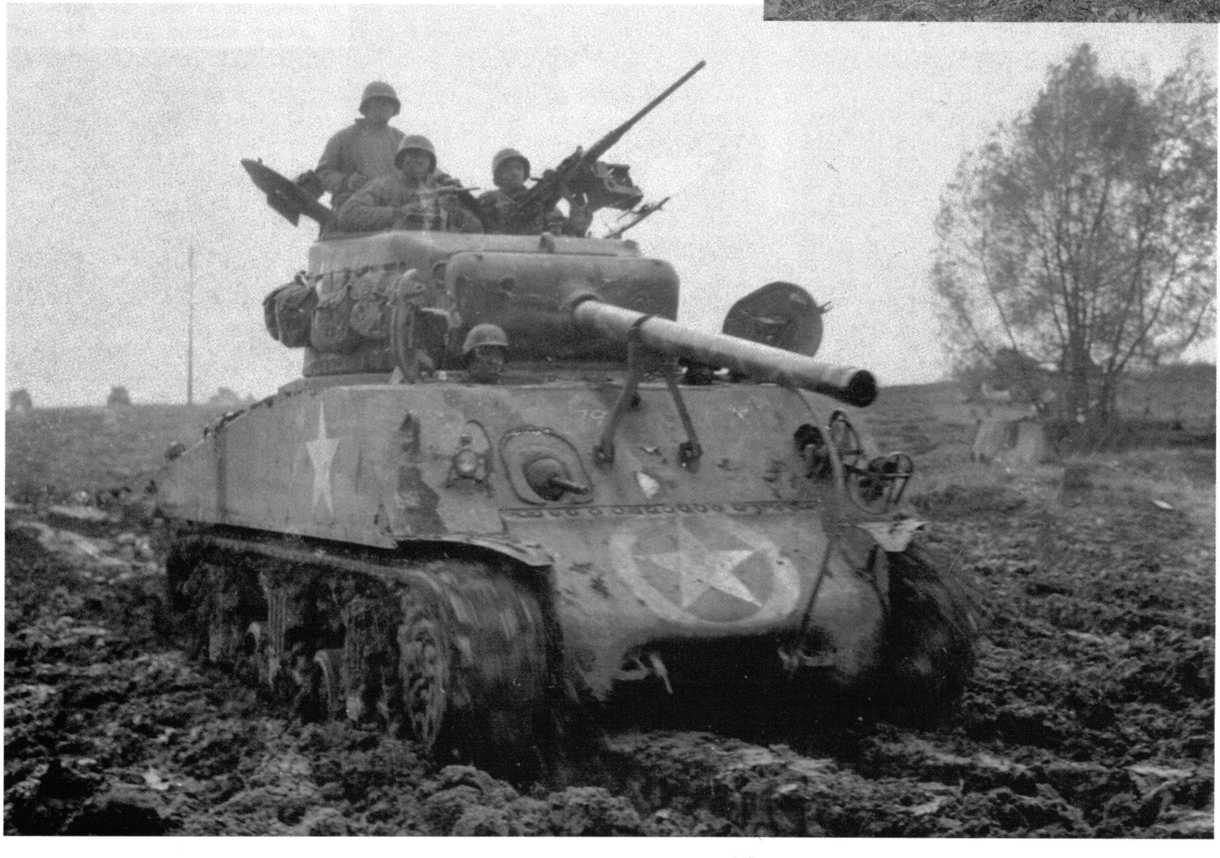
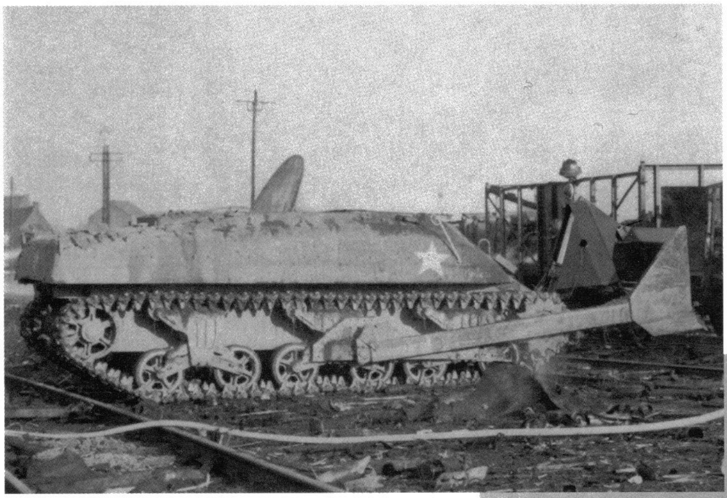
This is a good example of a M4 named "Bucks" near Eupen, Germany on 8 November 1944 after the Sommerfield matting has been added.

One of the most serious tactical shortcomings in US tanks was the difficulty in communicating with neighboring infantry. The tank radios could not communicate with the infantry's radios. The solution was either to rack mount an infantry radio like the SCR-300 into some tanks, or to attach an exterior phone to the tank. This is a M4 of the 709th Tank Bn. with an exterior phone added inside a .30 cal metal ammunition box. It is put to use during operations with the 81st Division near Zweifall on 24 November 1944.

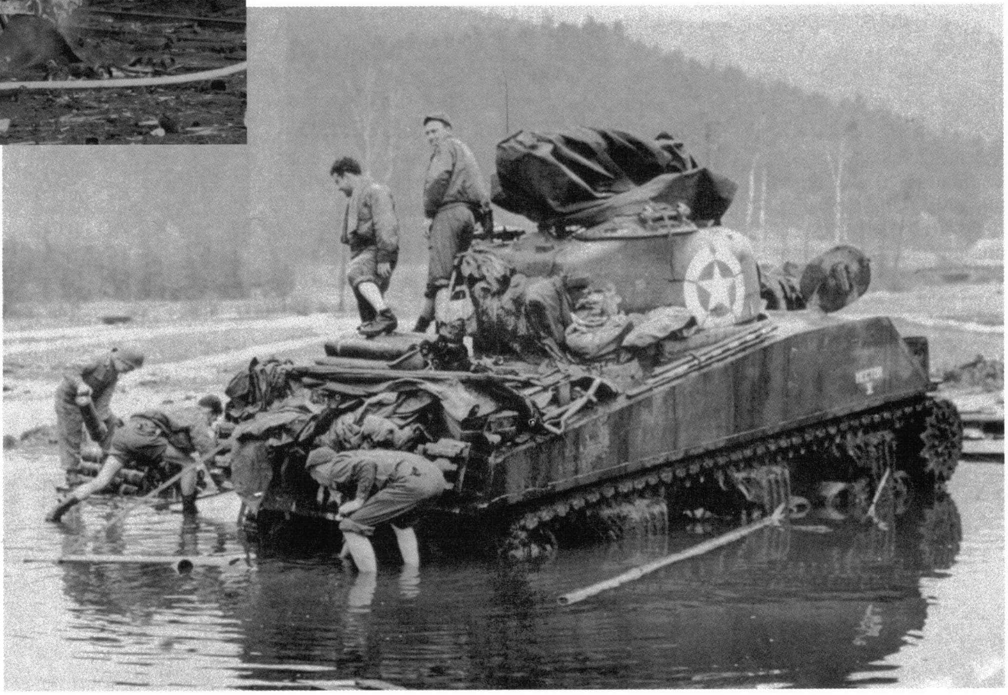




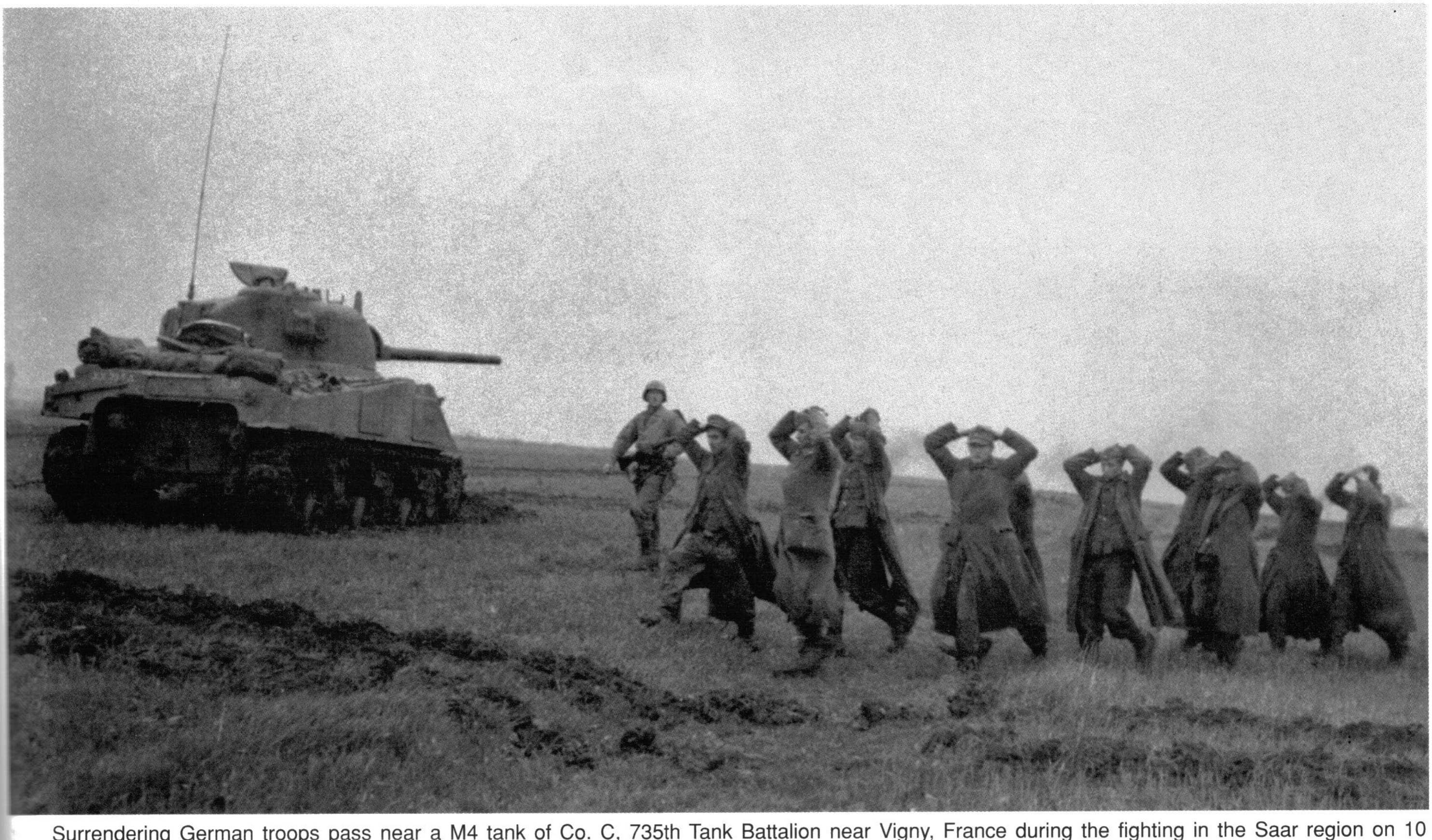
The US Army was still segregated in World War II and this extended to tank units as well. Two black tank battalions saw combat service in northwest Europe in 1944. The 761st Tank Bn. is the more famous, receiving the Presidential Unit Citation for its combat performance. This is a M4A3 (76) of the unit operating near Nancy, France on 5 November 1944.



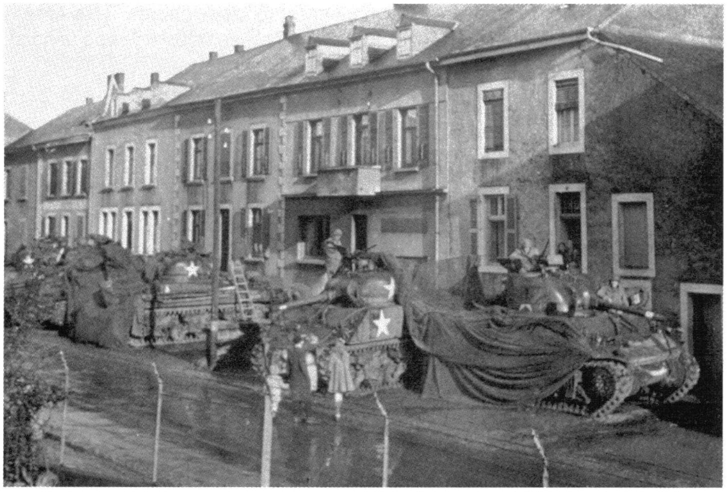
Some derelict tanks were later converted to other chores. This M4A1 hull has been fitted with a M1 dozer for use by Transportation Corps units in the railroad marshalling yard at Ramilles, Belgium in late 1944.



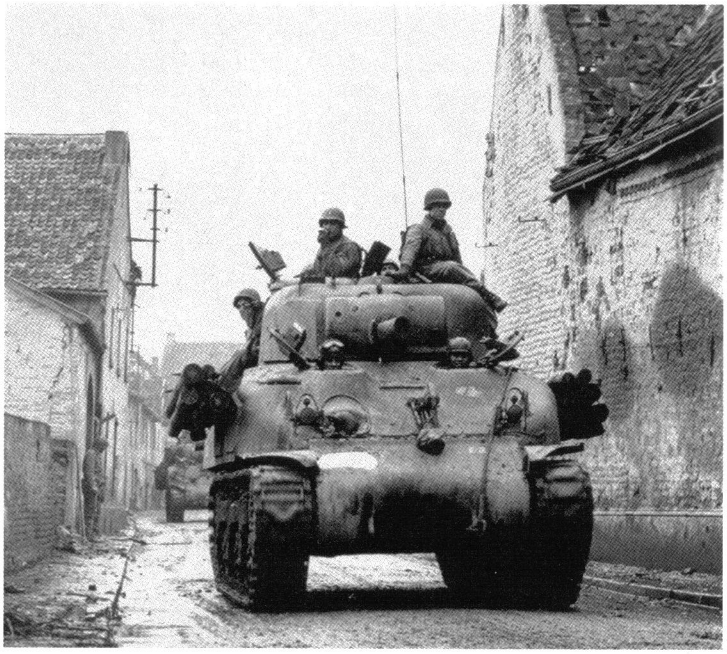
The rainy conditions in the autumn of 1944 are graphically shown in this view of a M4A3 (105) assault gun of the 756th Tank Battalion seen near Les Rouges Eaux on 8 November 1944.



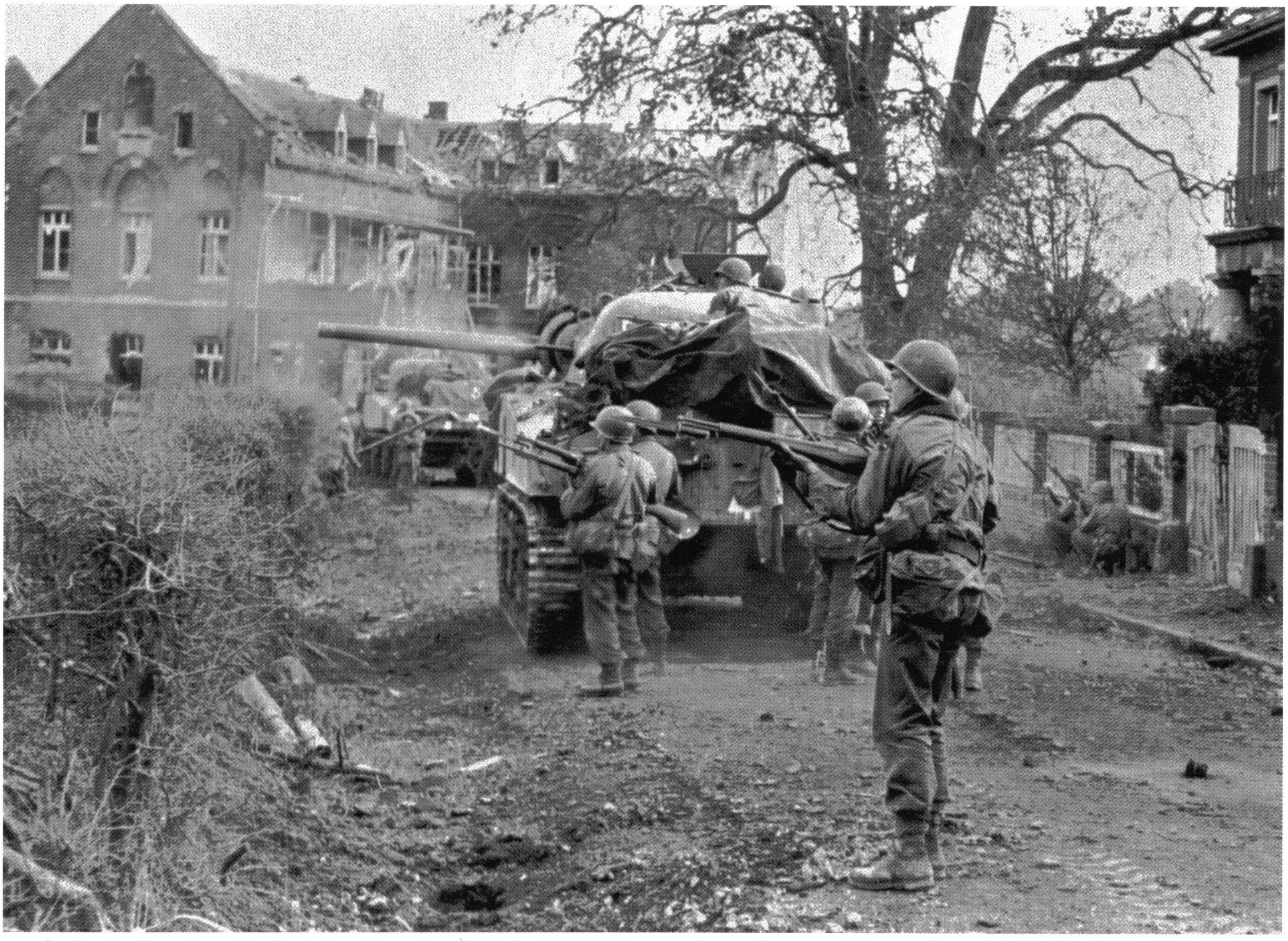
Surrendering German troops pass near a M4 tank of Co. C, 735th Tank Battalion near Vigny, France during the fighting in the Saar region on 10 November 1944.



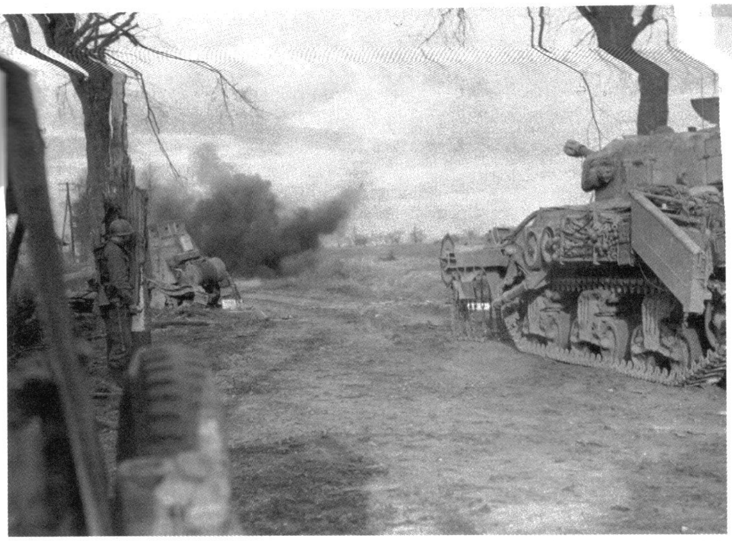
Tank units frequently used the shelter of small towns when not committed to the fighting. These are M4A3 tanks of the 10th Armored Division on the streets of Tetange, Luxembourg on 13 November 1944.



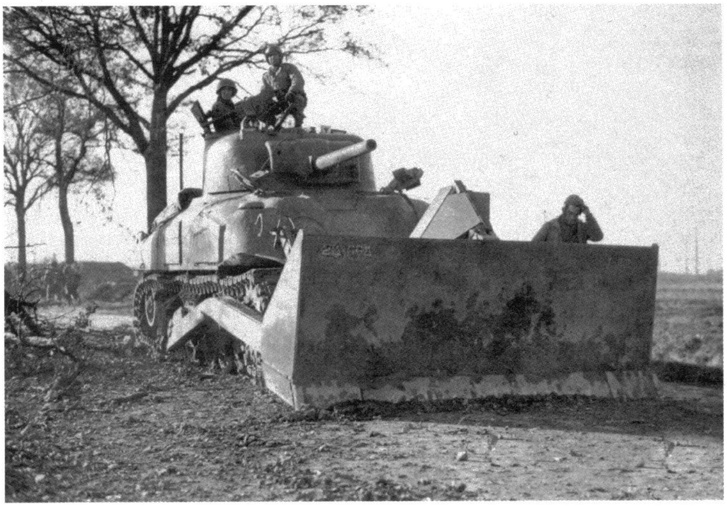
A M4A1 of the 2nd Armored Division passes through Beggendorf on 17 November 1944, one of the towns taken in the Aachen fighting that served as First Army's salient towards the Roer river. The tank is carrying logs which were used to drop under the tanks as unditching beams if the tank got stuck in the mud. This was a common practice in the division during the November 1944 Roer river offensive.



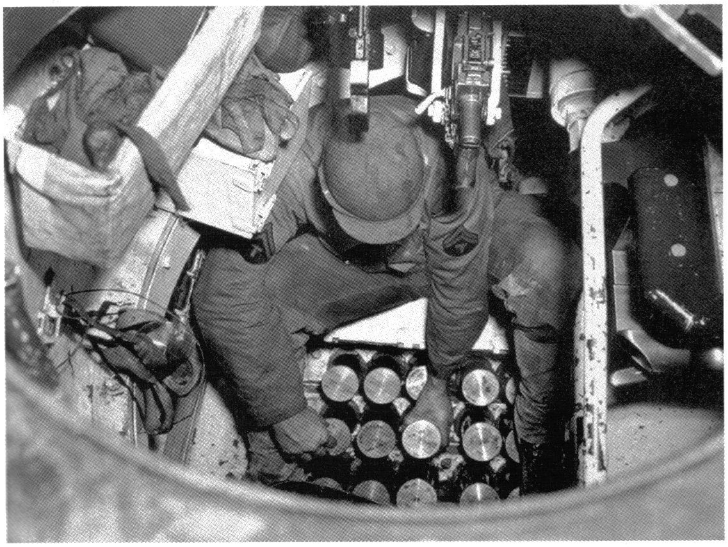
During the Roer river offensive in late November 1944, the 84th Division was the northernmost US unit in Europe, rubbing shoulders with the British 43rd Infantry Division to its north. The town of Geilenkirchen straddled the British and US zones, so the British provided tank support for US infantry operations in the town as seen here on 19 November 1944 with British Shermans providing fire support for the GIs.



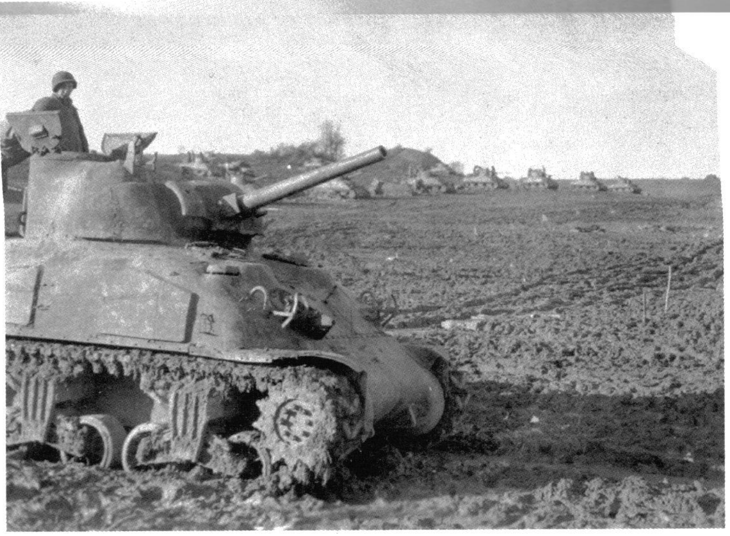
Laying next to the Dutch border, Geilenkirchen was the start of a major line of German fortifications and mine fields. So British Crab flail tanks helped the 84th Division clear approaches near the town during the 19 November 1944 fighting.



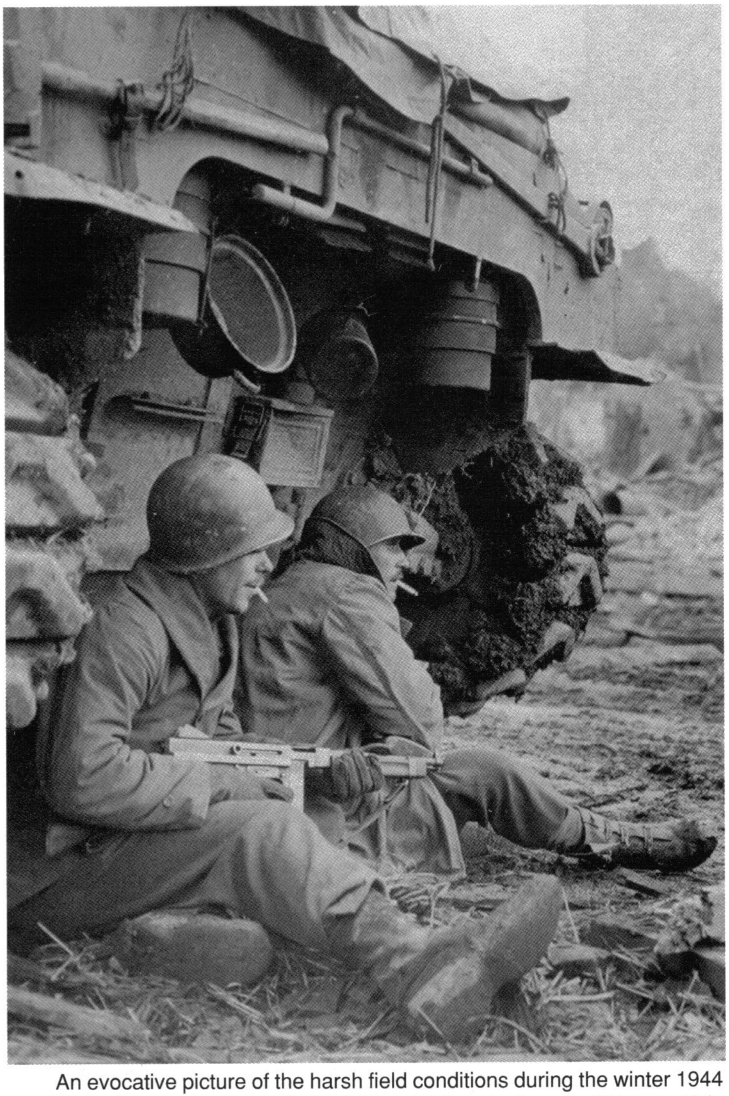
A M4A1 dozer tank from Co. I, 66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. clears a road during Roer river offensive on 19 November 1944. The M1 dozer assembly has been damaged during use, and the frame attaching the blade has been badly bent.



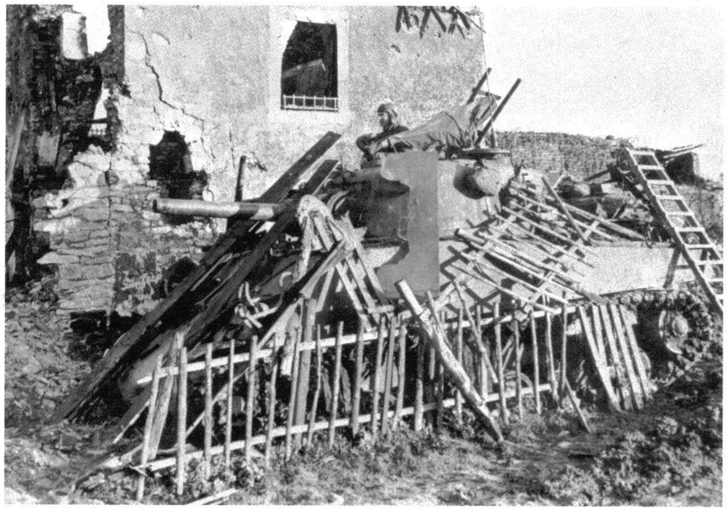
The turret interior of the M4 was more spacious on the left side to permit the loader to access the gun. This is a view down into the loader's station of an M4 of the 774th Tank Bn. near Welfrang, Luxembourg on 20 November 1944. He is placing rounds in the forward ready rack. The co-axial .30 cal machine gun breech can be seen immediately above his left shoulder, and the gun breech to the right of the photo.



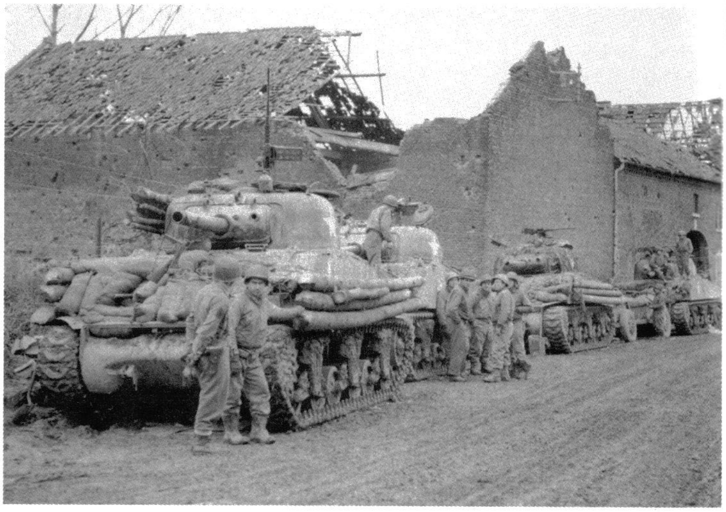
While not as common a practice as in Italy, tanks in northwest Europe were sometimes used to provide indirect artillery fire support. This M4A1 of the 32nd Arm'd Regt., 3rd Armored Div. along with other tanks from the unit are being used as improvised artillery during the Roer river offensive on 19 November 1944.



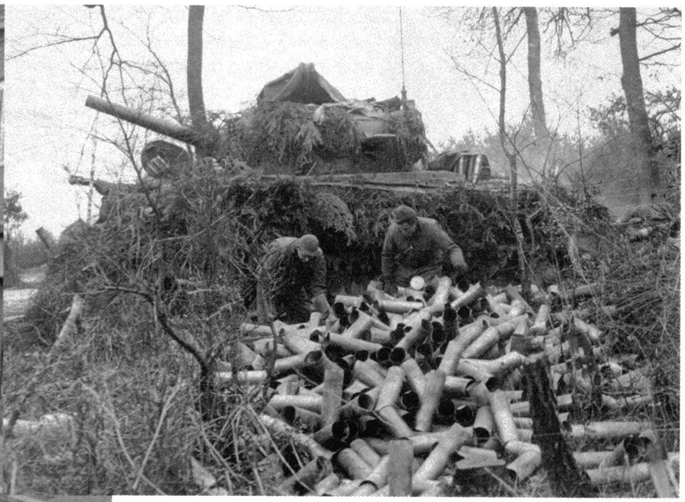
An evocative picture of the harsh field conditions during the winter 1944 fighting in Germany as two GIs huddle under the shelter of a M4 tank. This tank has been fitted with an external tank telephone as can be seen in the form of the .30 cal. ammo box attached to the engine door above the head of the GI to the right.



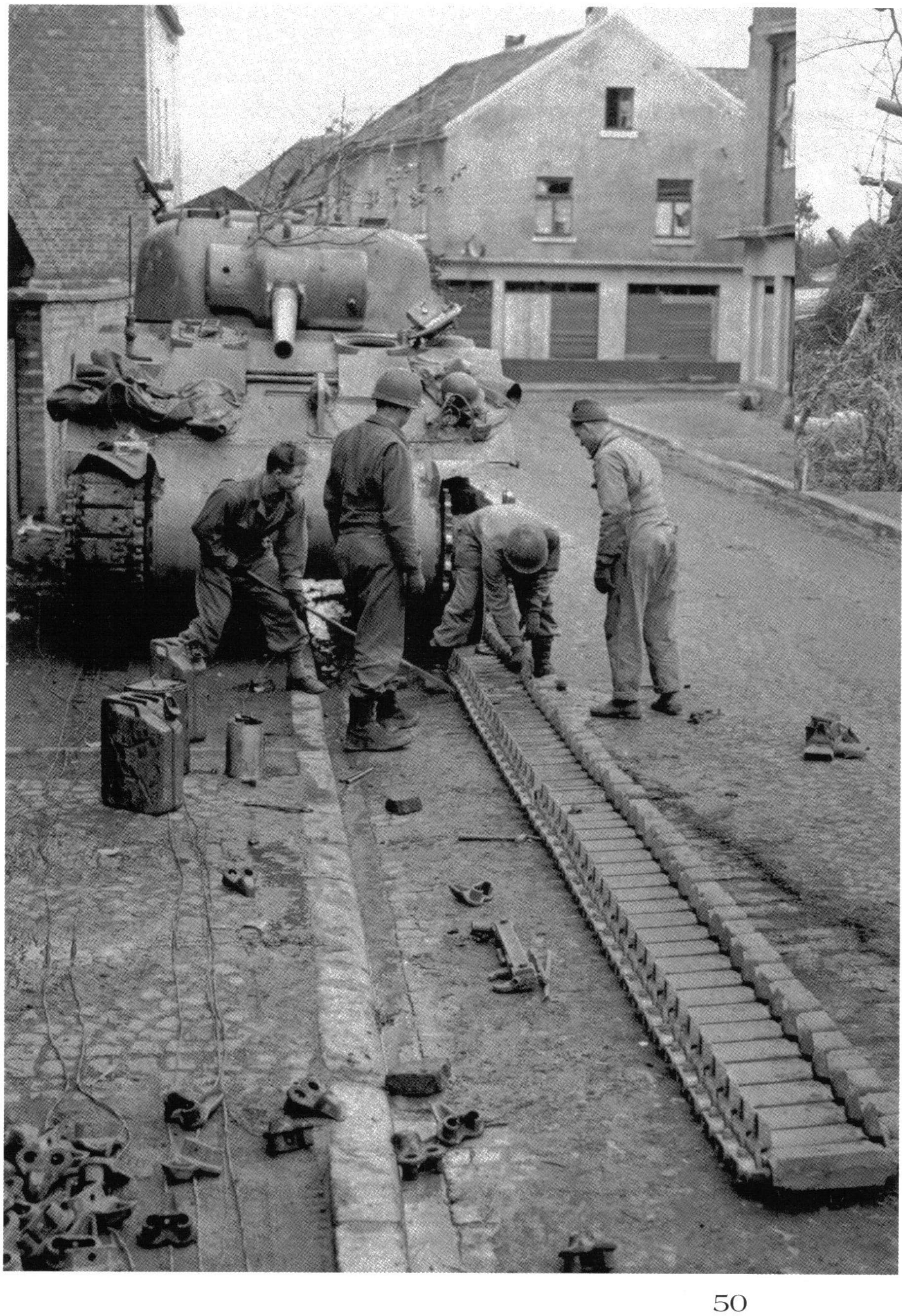
A M4 (105) assault gun of the 3rd Armored Division sits well concealed under improvised camouflage in the ruins of Eschweiler, Germany on 26 November 1944 during the Roer river offensive.



As in the case of the 2nd Armored Div., the 771st Tank Bn. had suffered from enough experiences of bogged down tanks that its tanks carried unditching logs during the Roer fighting. These are the M4 (105) assault guns of the HQ company in Welz, Germany on 29 November 1944. Although there were plans to equip all tanks in the operation with duck bills, there was neither enough time or equipment to do so.

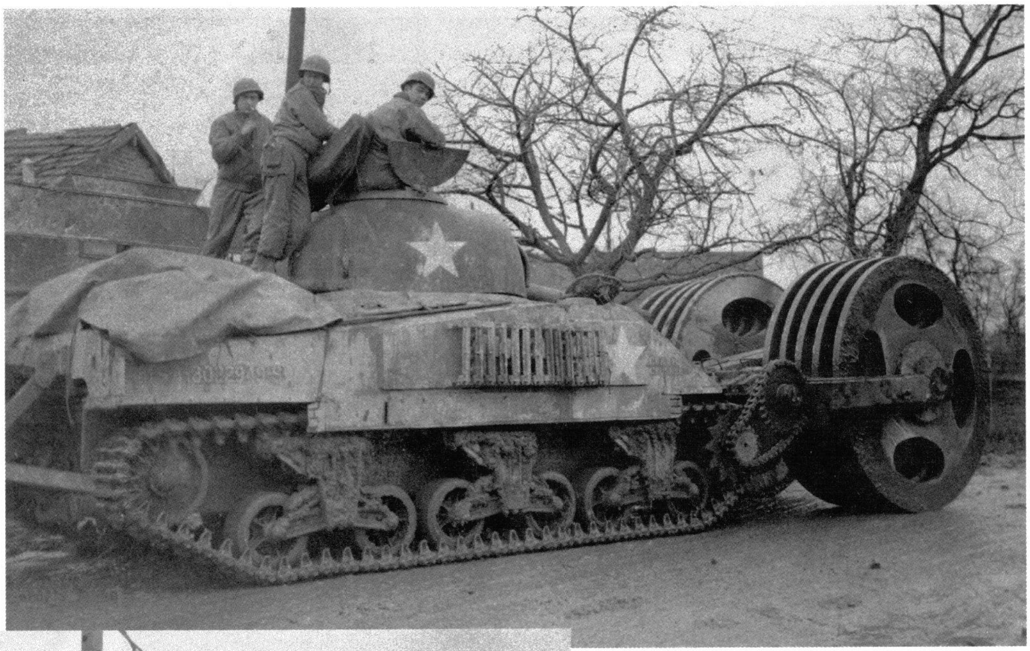


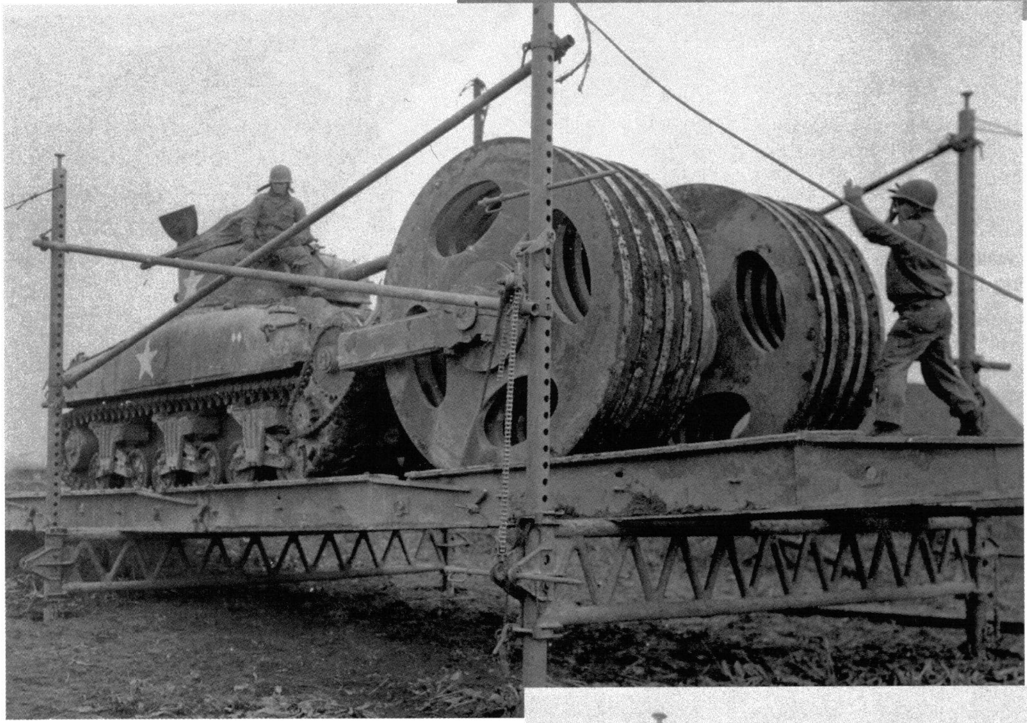
The ground is littered with spent 105mm howitzer casings near a M4 (105) assault gun of the HQ company, 70th Tank Bn. providing fire support during the fighting near Schevenhutte, Germany on 7 December 1944.



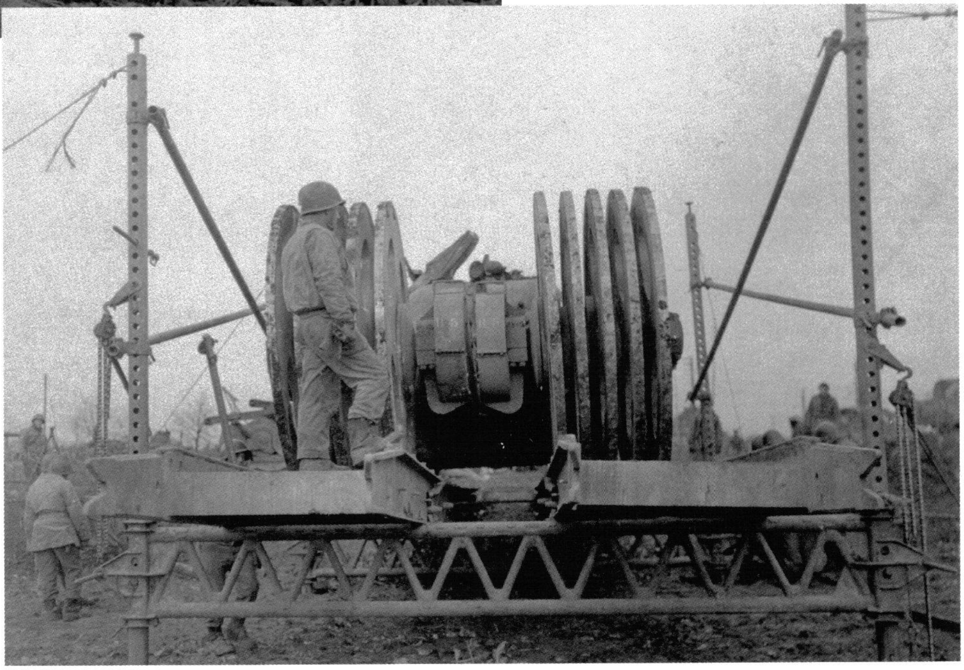
The crew of a M4 tank of the 2nd Armored Division attach duck bills to their tank track during a refit in Baesweiller, Germany on 5 December 1944. The end connectors without duck bills can be seen in the left foreground, the end connectors with duck bills are seen on the track to the right.

In the autumn of 1944, two tank battalions, the 738th and 739th, were converted into specialized tank battalions for the use of minefield clearing equipment. These had a company with 18 T1E1 mine rollers, two companies with 12 T1E3 mine roller tanks, and six dozer tanks. The 739th Tank Bn. (Special) was deployed with the Ninth Army on 24 November 1944. This M4 is fitted with the T1E3 mine rollers and is passing through Beggendorf, Germany on 10 December 1944.

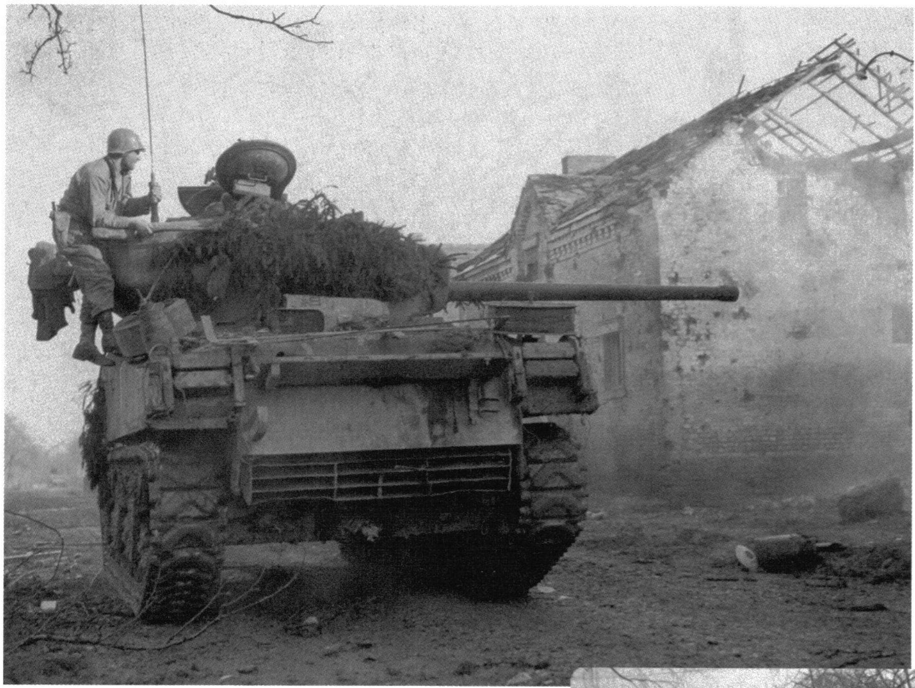




There was some concern that the added weight of the mine rollers would wreck treadway bridges. So the 739th Tank Bn. (Special) sent a T1E3 roller tank to a local engineer battalion to test the effect of the added weight.

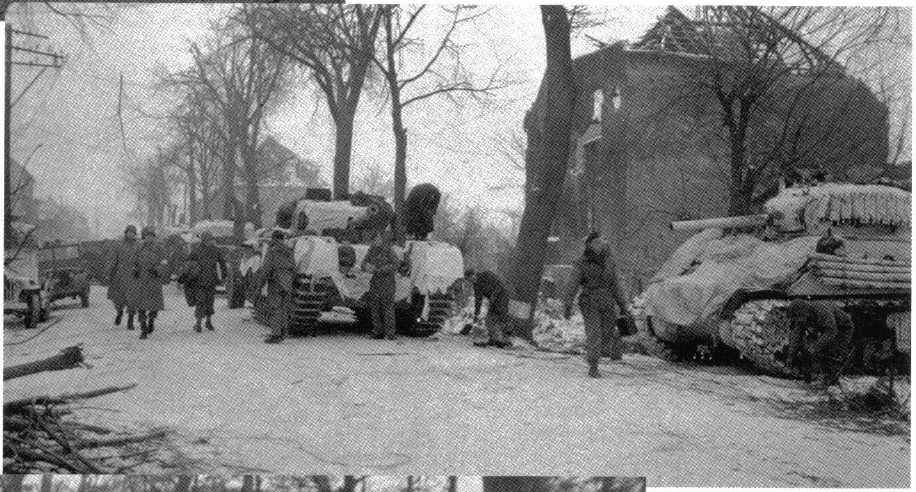


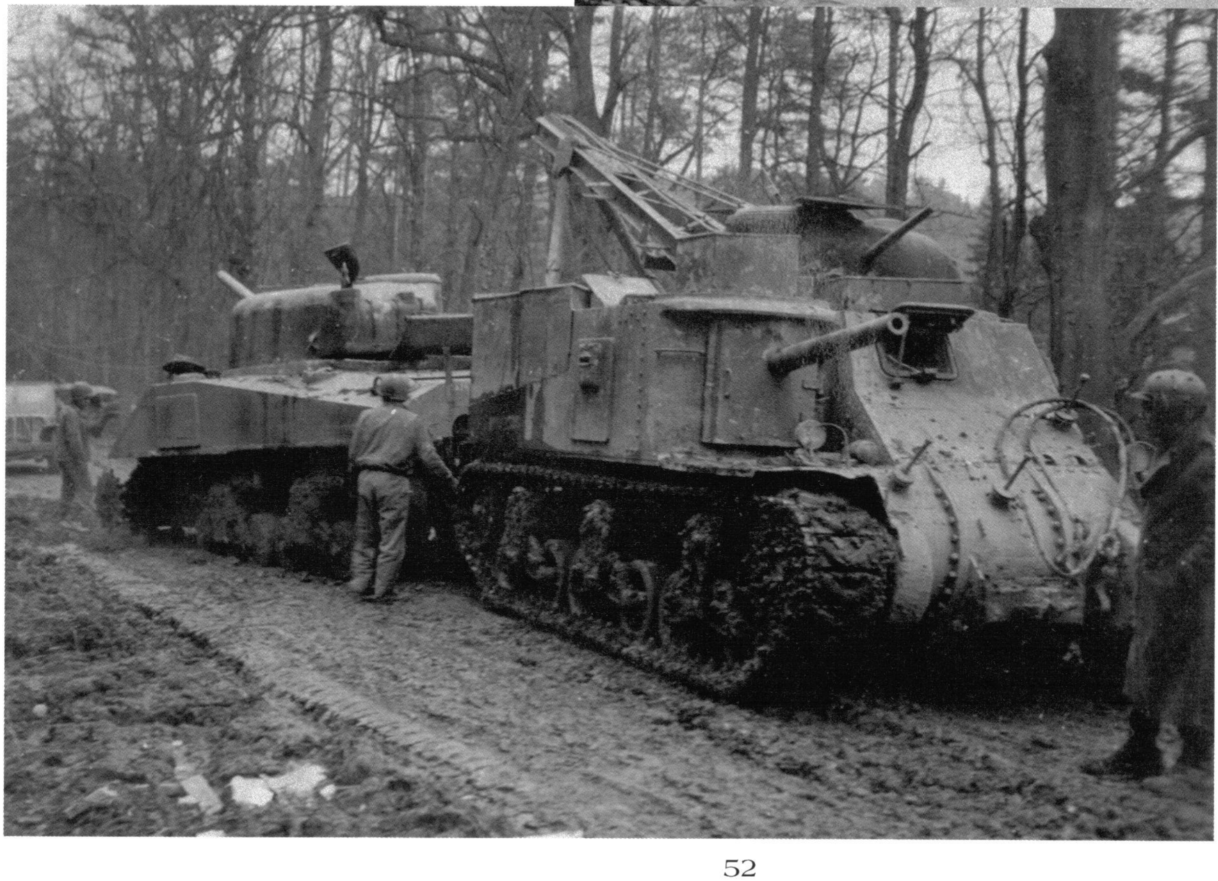
This front view of a T1E3 mine roller tank moving across a treadway bridge provides an interesting look at the mounting assembly in the center of the rig.



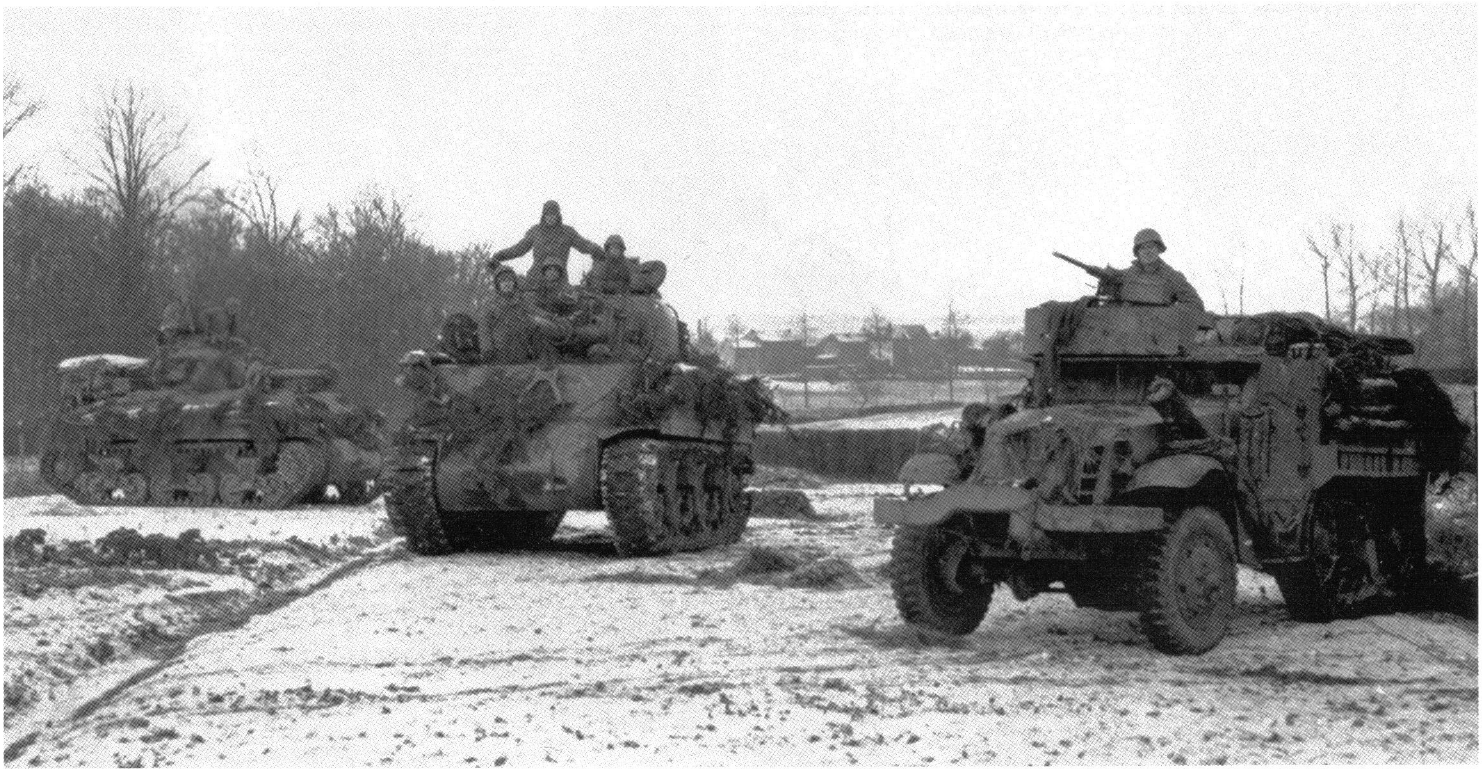
Shortages of equipment occasionally led to substitution. This M4A3 (76) is being used by the 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion in Gurzenich, Germany during the fighting there on 14 December 1944. The battalion was normally equipped with the M10 3-in gun motor carriage.

A GI peers inside a M4 which has slid into a water-filled hole in the ruins of Duren, Germany during the fighting there in December 1944.

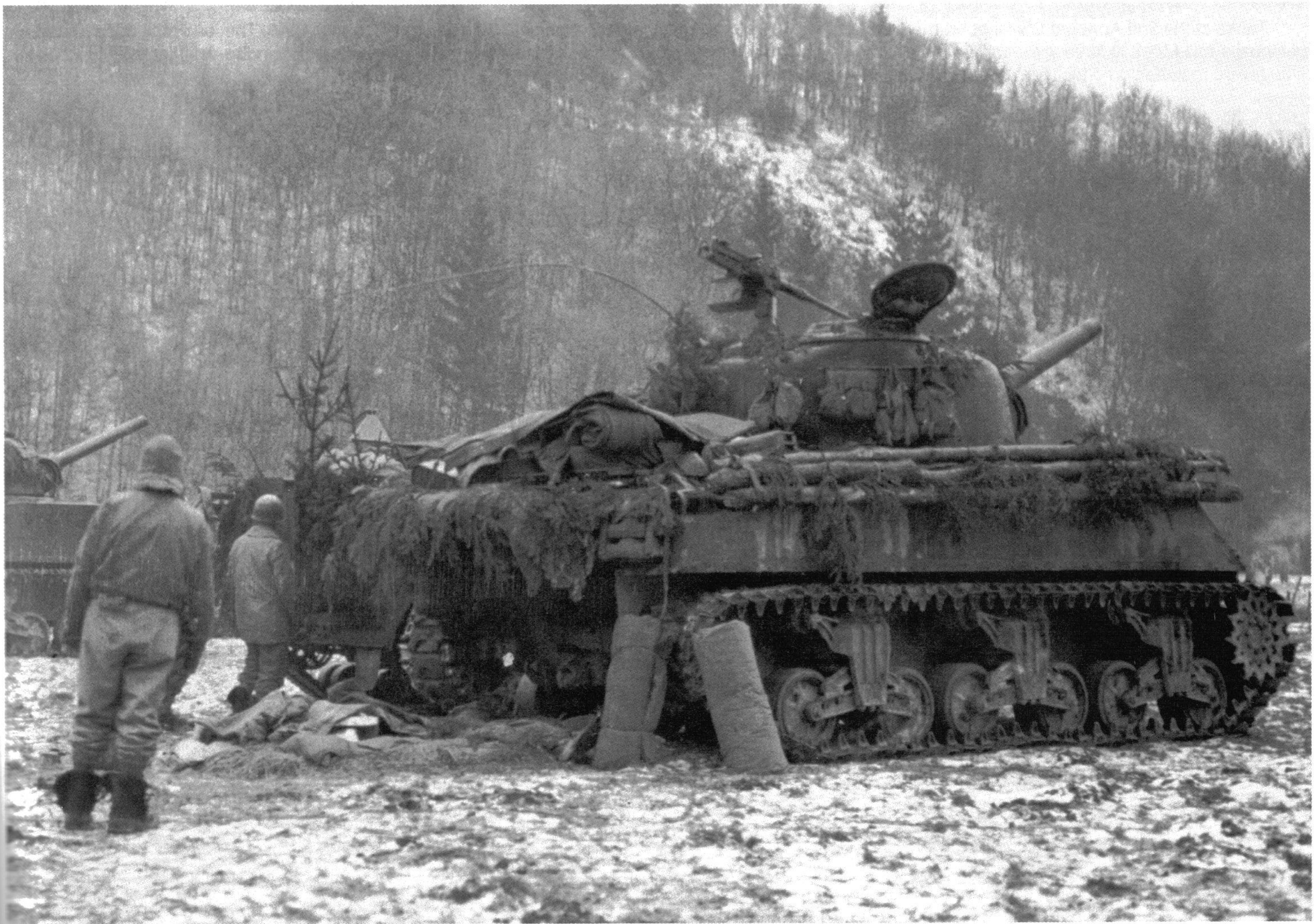




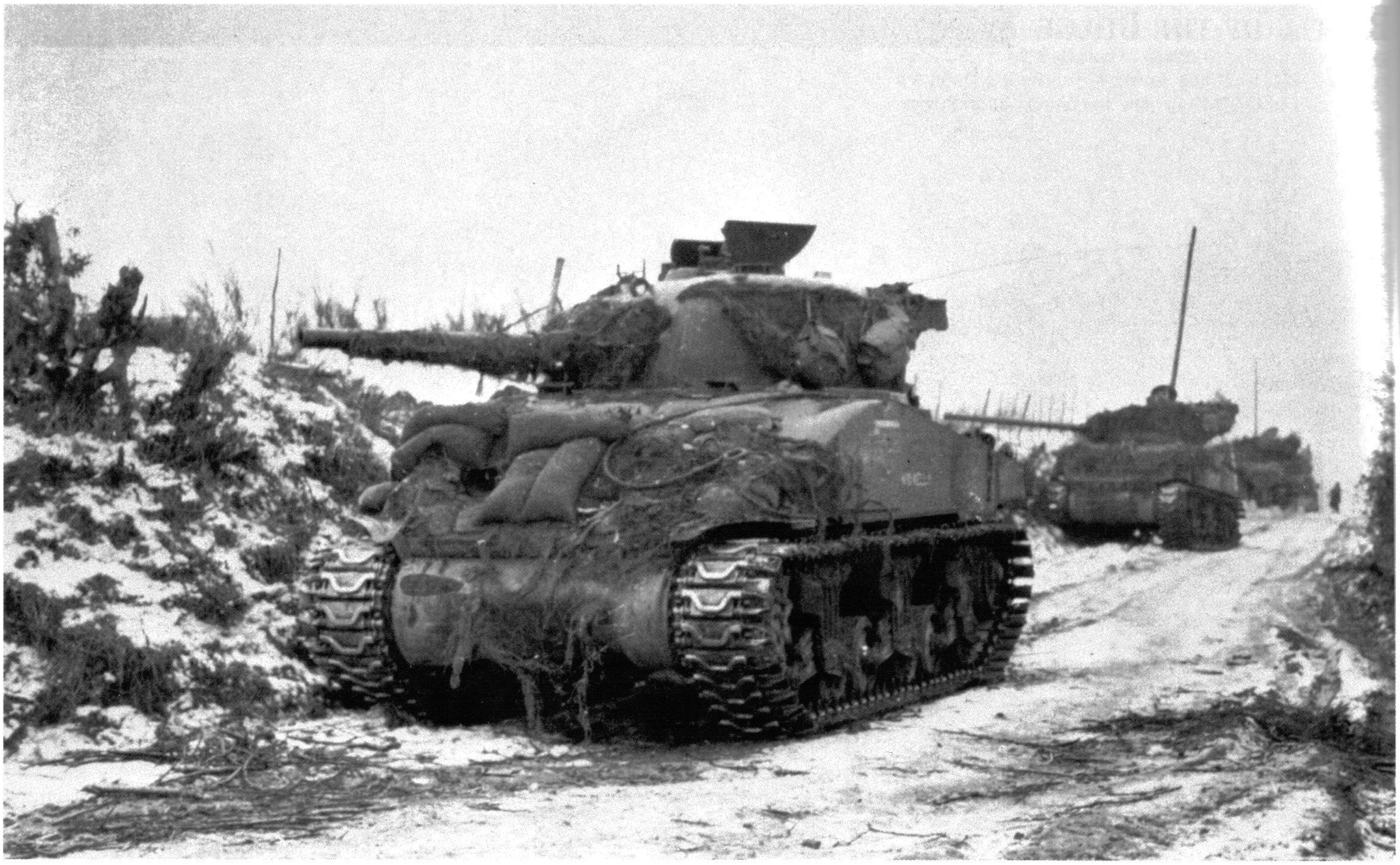
A T2 armored recovery vehicle of the 463rd Ordnance Bn. tows a M4 tank of the 746th Tank Bn. that has struck a mine. The mine has completely blown off the lead bogie assembly. The T2 appears to be impressively armed, but in fact the 75mm hull gun and 37mm turret gun are dummies intended to make it appear like the normal M3 medium tank on which it was based.



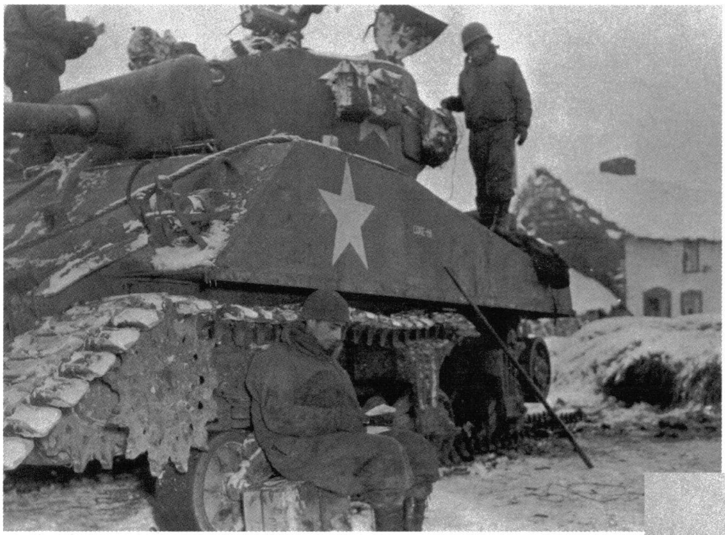
The HQ company of 2/32nd Arm'd Regt., 3rd Armored Div. move forward near Marche, Belgium on 31 December 1944. The tanks are M4 (105) assault guns, while to the right is a M3A1 half-track.



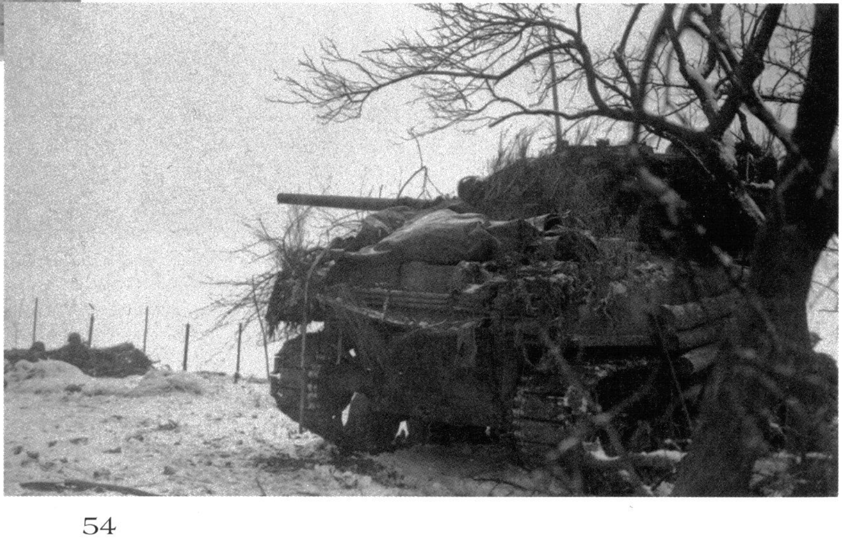
M4 (105) assault guns of the HQ company of 2/32nd Arm'd Regt. provide fire support during operations on 3 January 1945 in Belgium.



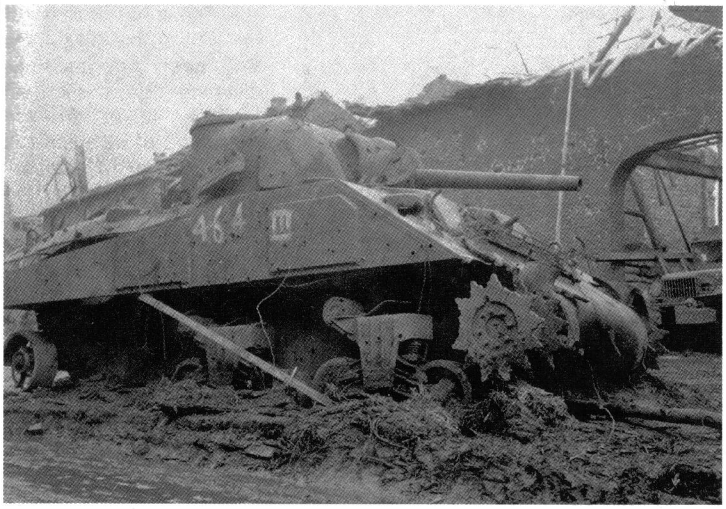
Tanks of the 2nd Armored Div. support the 84th Division during the fighting near Amonines, Belgium on 2 January 1945. The lead tank appears to be a composite hull M4. It is fitted with the T54 metal chevron tracks with duck bill extenders. There was quite a bit of variation in the detail of the duck bills, as many were manufactured locally in shops in Belgium and France.



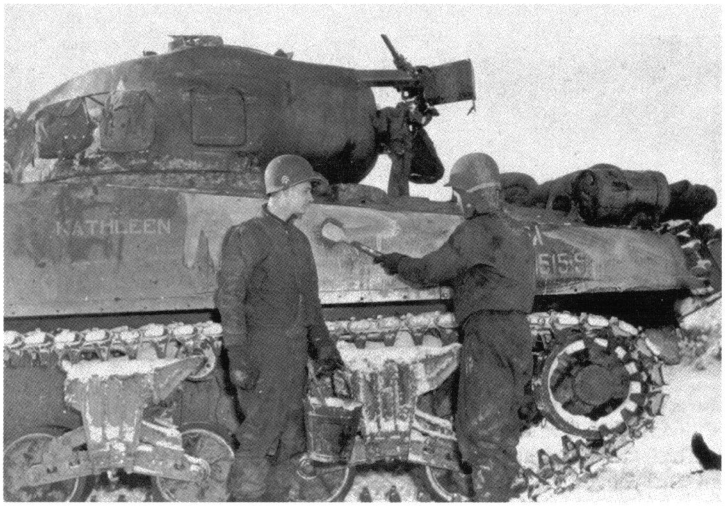
The crew of "Come In", a M4 (76) of C/22nd Tank Bn., 11th Armored Div., do maintenance on their tank while bivouacked near Jodenville, Belgium on 5 January 1945.



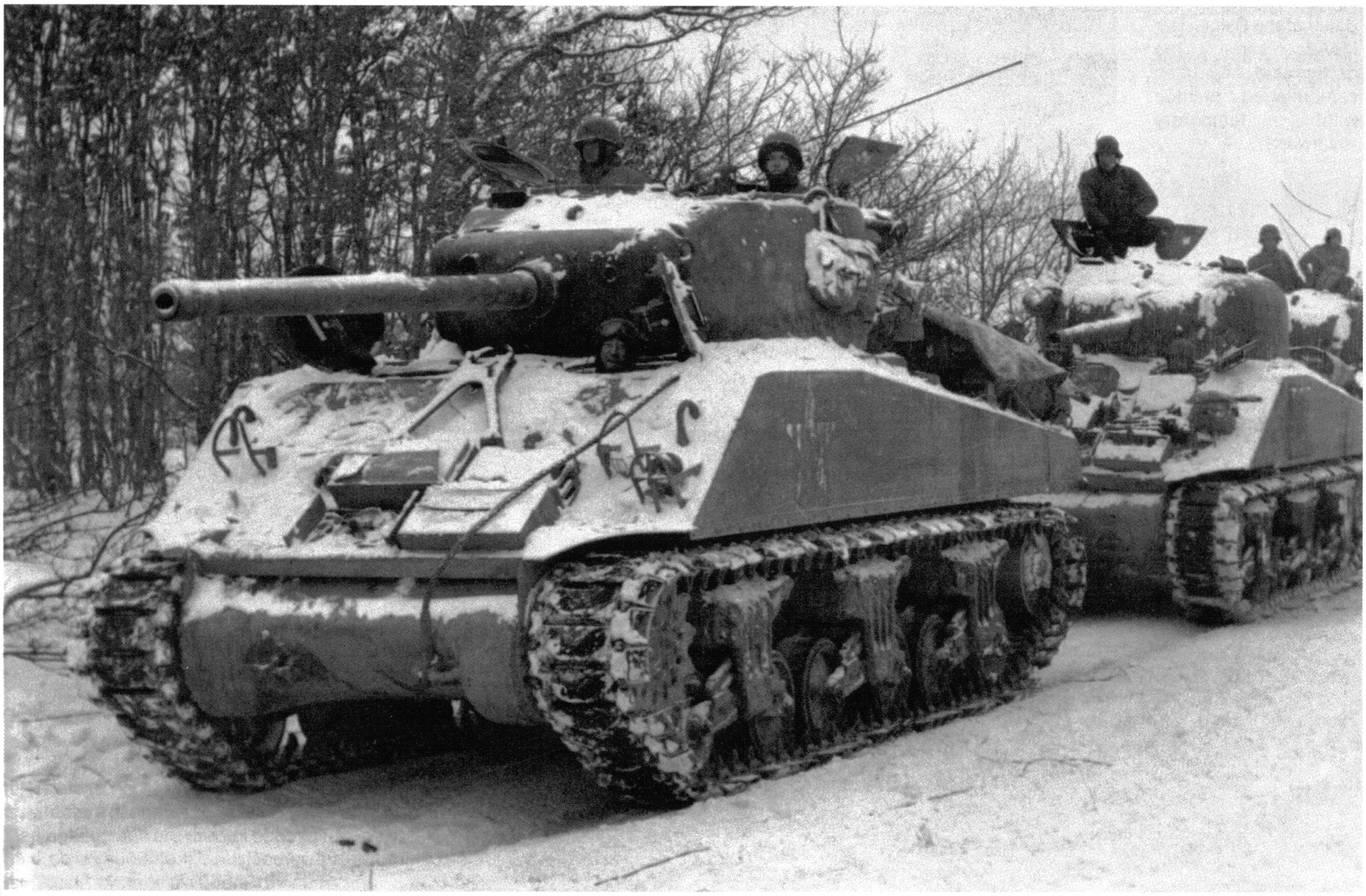
A M4 (76mm) of the 750th Tank Bn. provides support for the 290th Infantry Regt., 75th Division in positions near Beffs, Belgium on 7 January 1945.



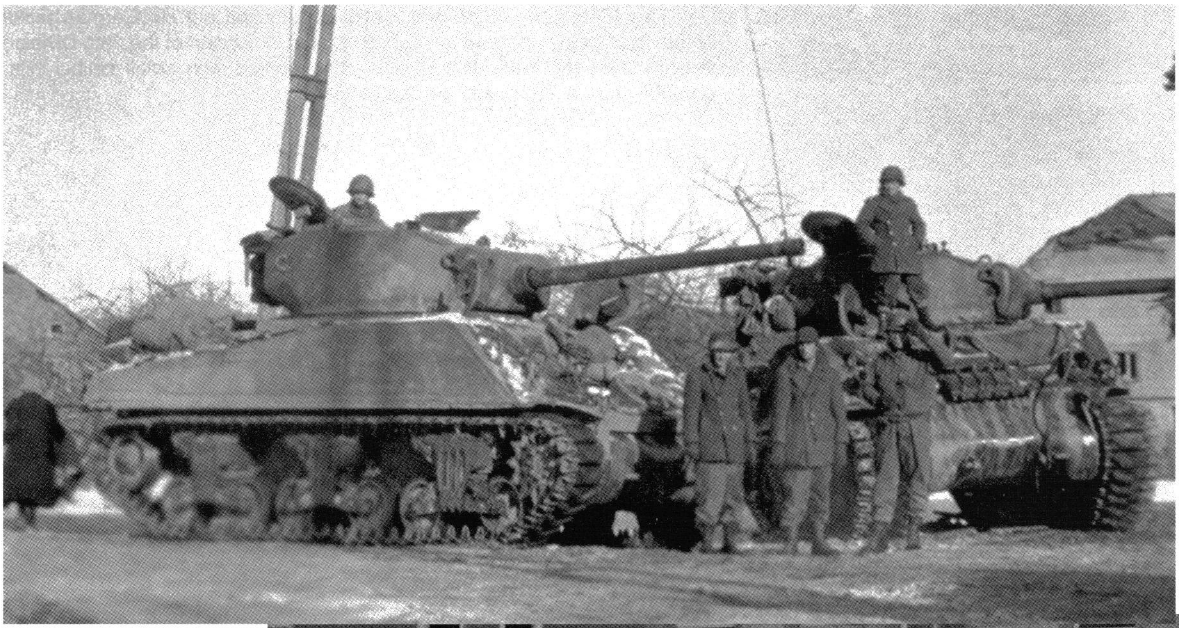
This M4 of the 747th Tank Battalion knocked out six German tanks before itself being knocked out during combat in support of the 29th Division in early January 1945. The tank is pock-marked with small caliber hits, probably from a 20mm anti-aircraft cannon.



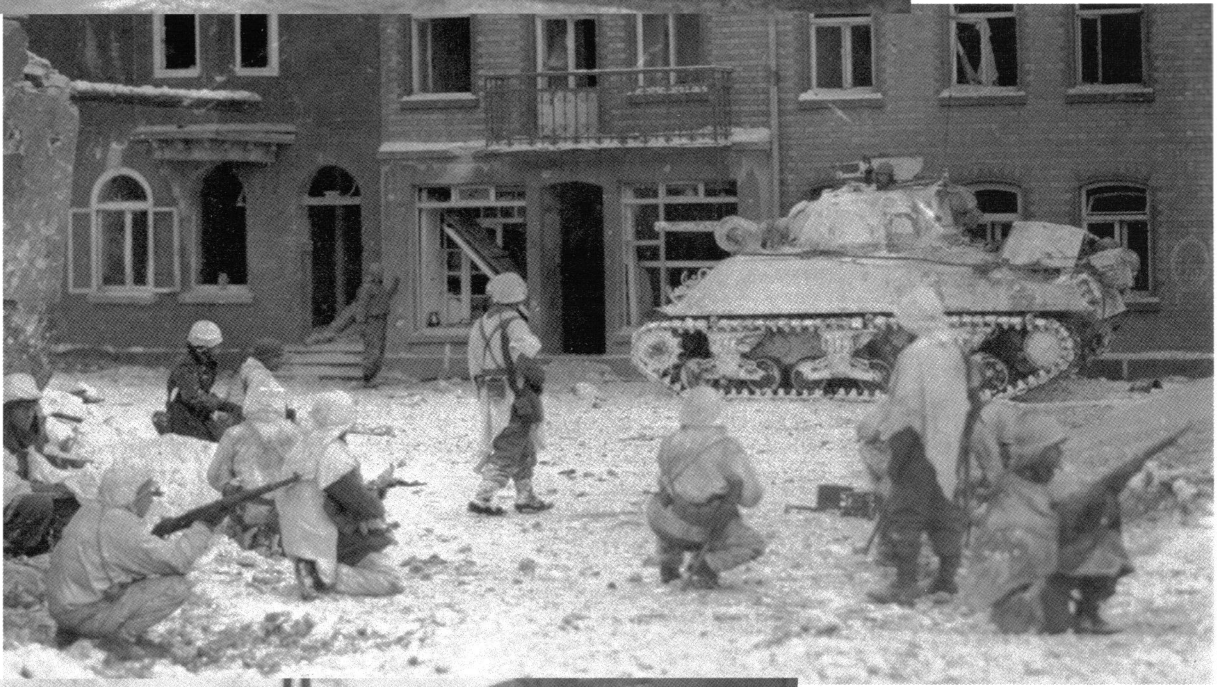
"Kathleen" a M4 (76) of Co. B, 41st Tank Battalion receives a coat of white wash camouflage on 10 January 1945 while bivouacked in Bereneux, Belgium.



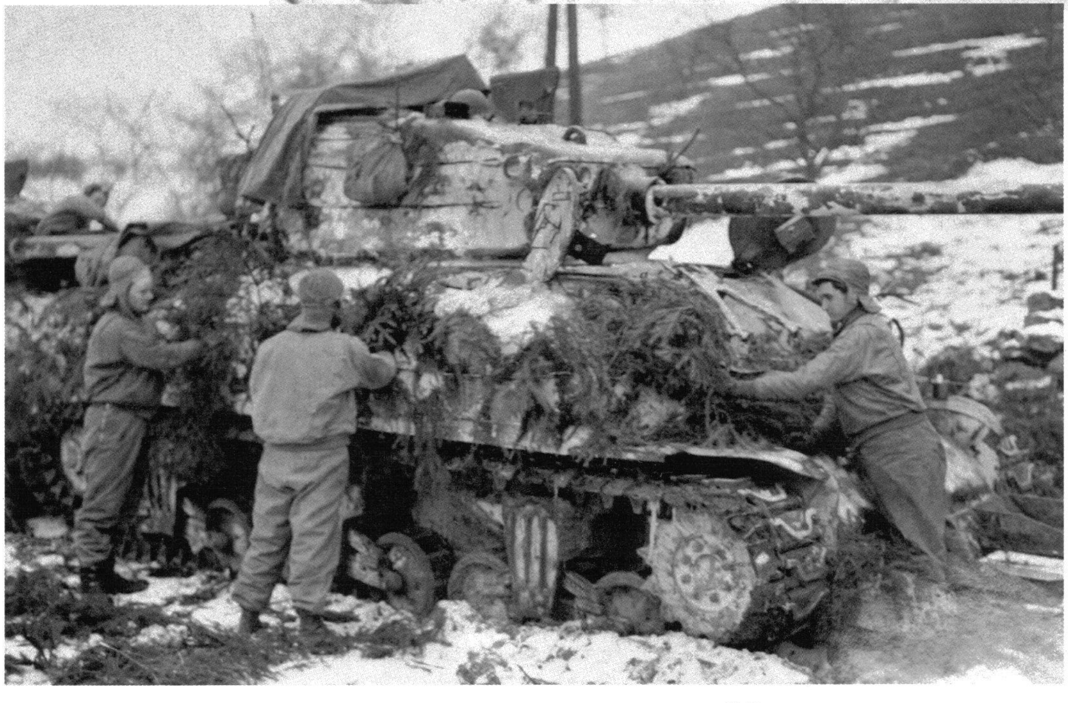
A M4A3 (76) leads a column from the 712th Tank Bn. during operations near Bavigne, Luxembourg on 12 January 1945. It is fitted with T48 rubber chevron track with duck bill extenders.



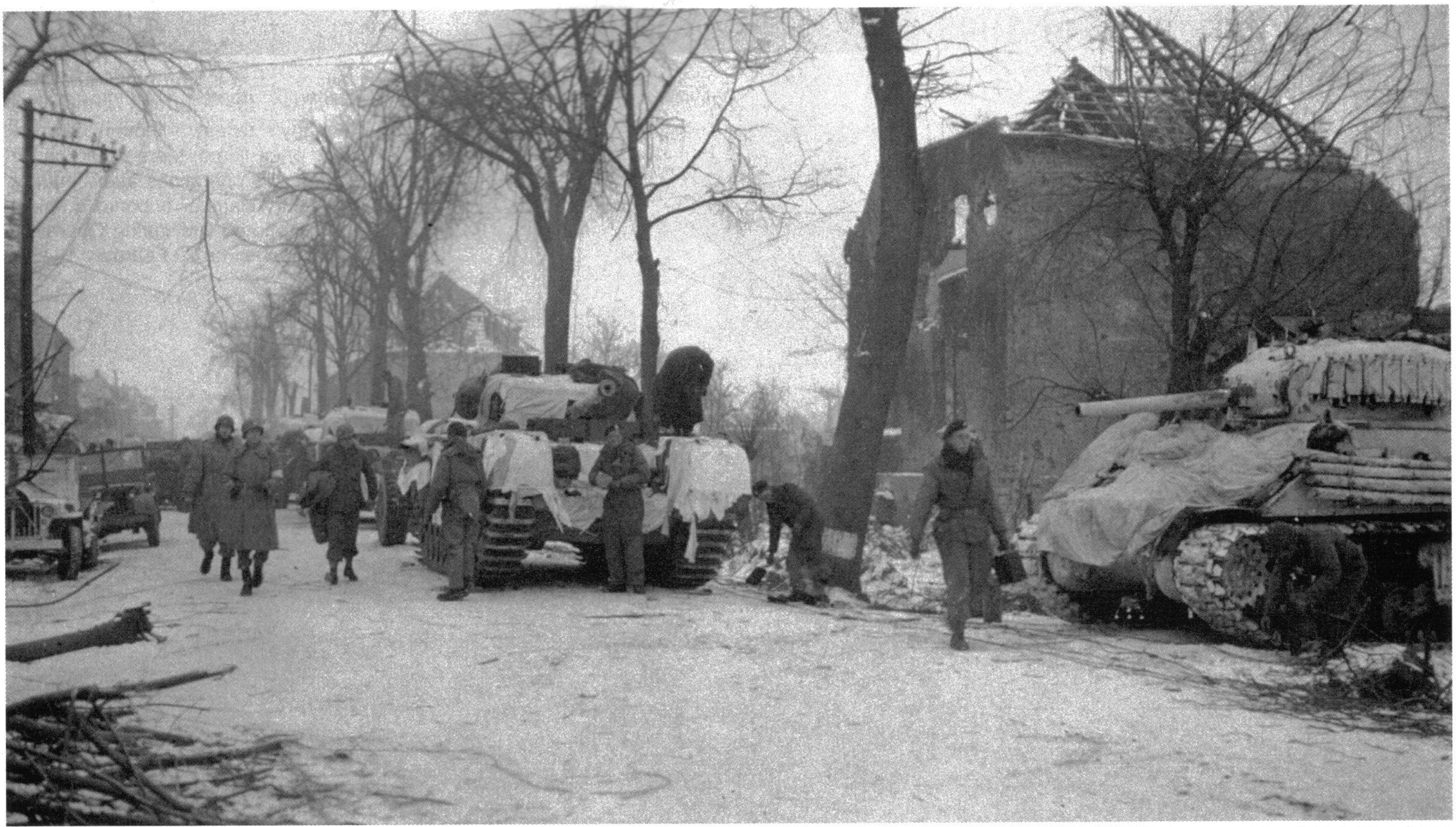
The crews of a pair of M4 (76) of the 771st Tank Bn. peer off into the distance at a German artillery strike on the outskirts of Berismenil, Belgium, on 14 January 1945 while supporting the 84th Division in the area. Like most separate tank battalions at this stage of the war, the vehicles are very plainly marked and the stars have been painted over.



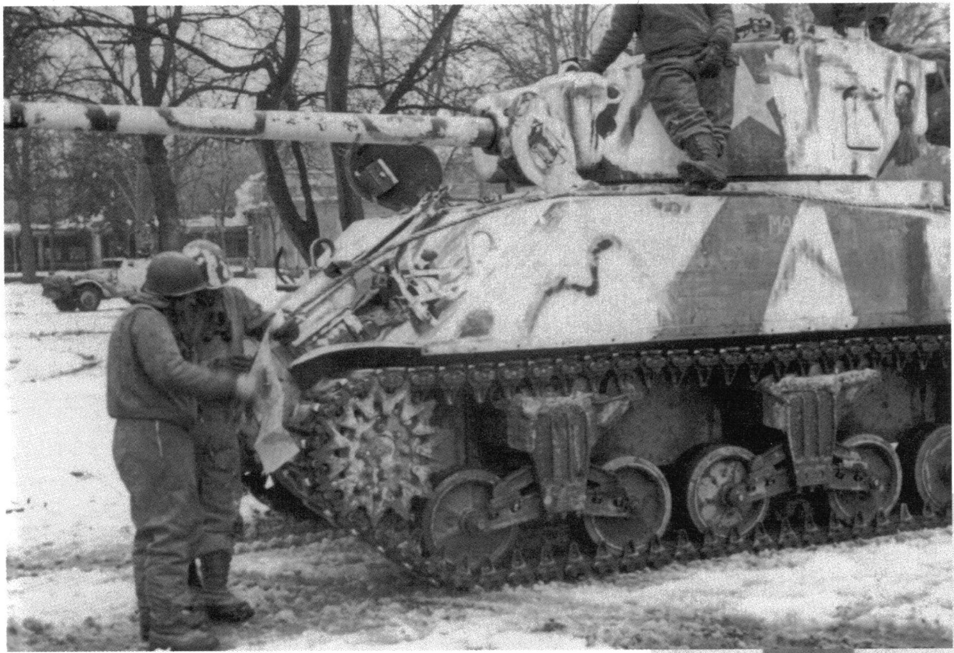
GIs of Co. C, 23rd Armored Infantry Bn., 7th Armored Div. wait for orders in the streets of St. Vith, center of some of the most intense fighting of the Battle of the Bulge. The M4A3 in the background has been camouflaged painted with temporary whitewash.



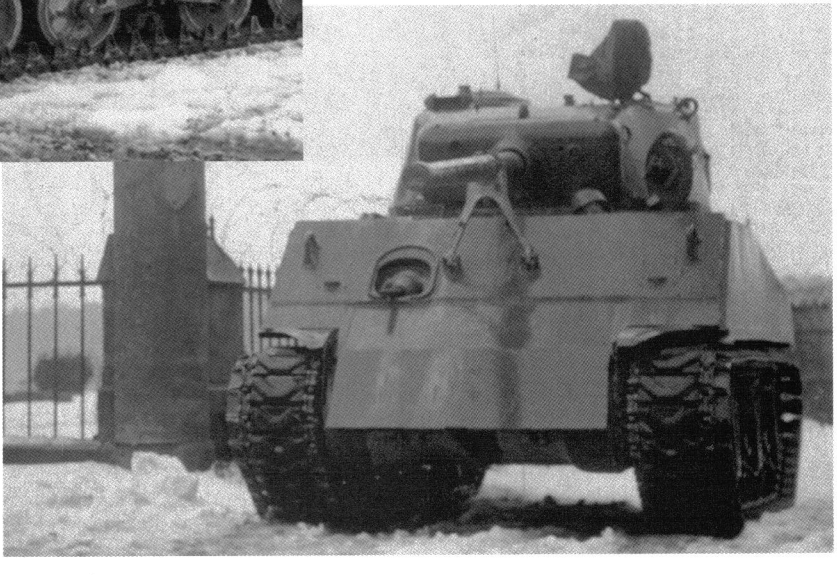
The crew of a M4A1 (76) of the 4th Armored Div. add foliage to their tank in an effort to improve its camouflage near Kiewelbach, Luxembourg on 18 January 1945. This tank is fitted with metal chevron track and duck bill end extenders.



It was rare to see US and British tanks together on the same mission. The exception was along the border of the US 9th Army and the British 21st Army Group where the two allies met. Here, an American M4 can be seen near a British Churchill during a joint attack against the town of Brachelen on 26 January 1945.

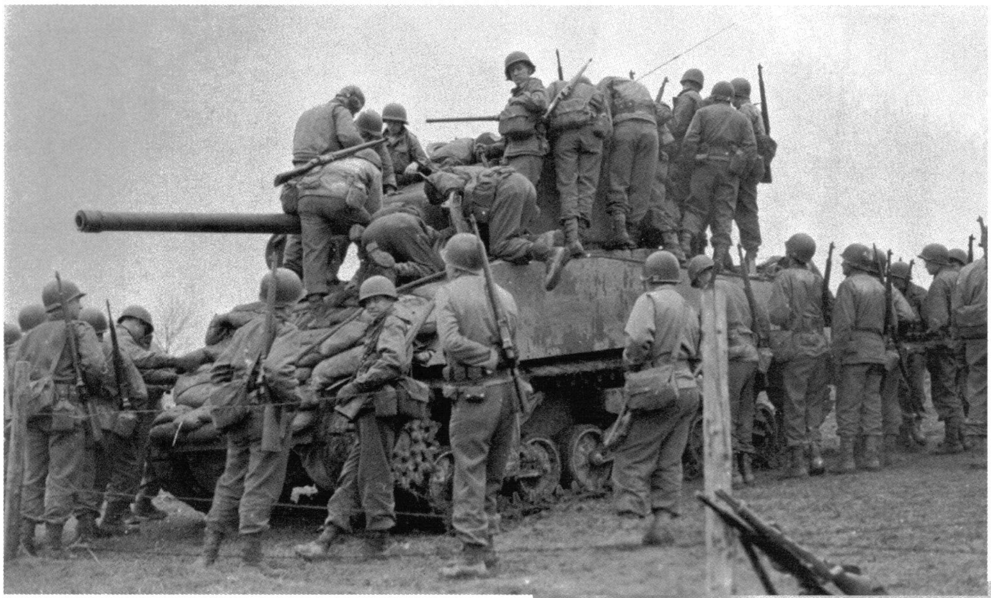


In the wake of the Ardennes offensive, the Germans launched Operation "Nordwind" against US and French forces in Alsace. This is a snow camouflaged M4A3 (76) of the 709th Tank Bn. supporting the 75th Division during the fighting in Alsace in February 1945.



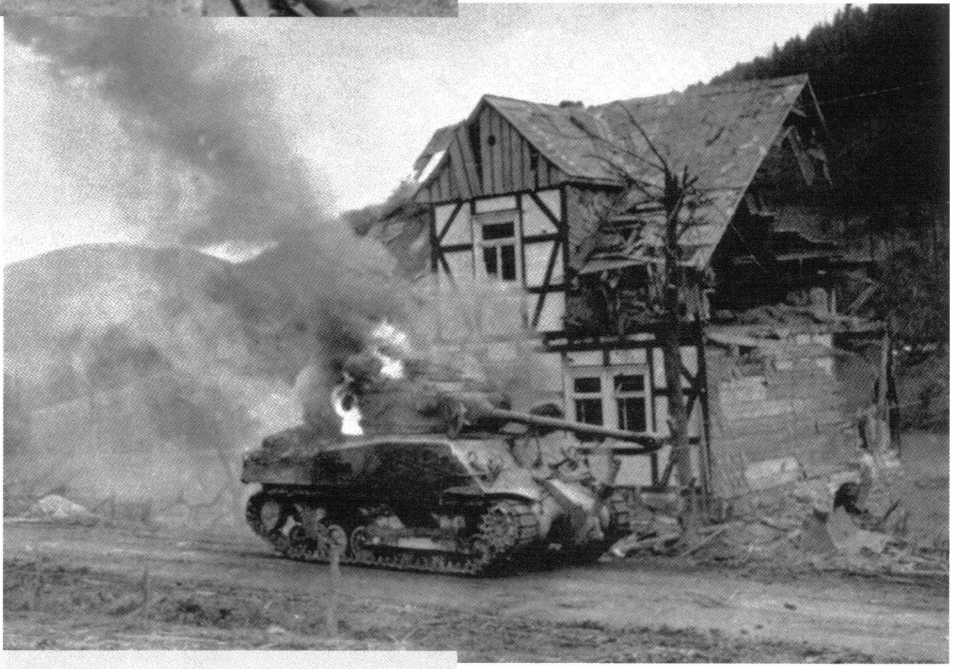
US tankers were not pleased by the poor armor protection of the M4. After the Battle of the Bulge, Patton's Third Army decided to initiate a program of uparmoring M4s with armor plate taken from knocked out American and German tanks as an alternative to the ineffective use of sand bags. The improvements were carried out by ordnance companies starting in February 1945. This is a good example of a M4A3 (76) stationed with the 303rd MP Co. at Patton's HQ in Luxembourg City. The glacis plate came straight off another M4, complete with the various attachments and fittings.

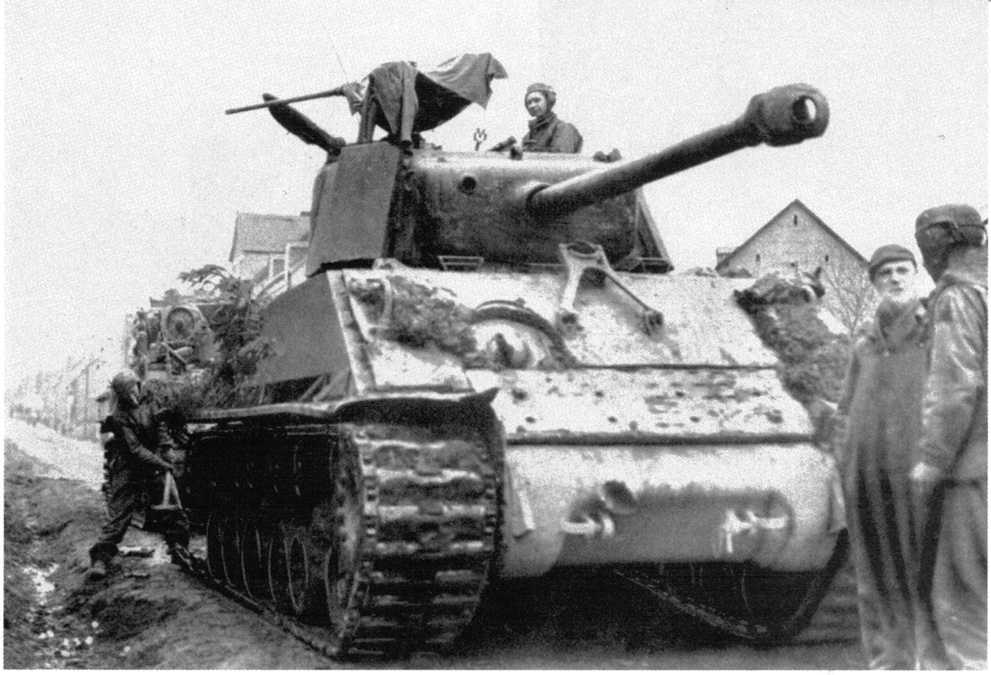
THE FINAL OFFENSIVE OF 1945



The failure of the German Ardennes offensive crippled the German army and ensured Germany's defeat. Although German resistance was often fierce, there would be no serious check on US operations after January 1945. Here, infantry clamber onboard a M4A3 (76) of the 2nd Armored Div. during Operation "Grenade" near Aachen on 20 February 1945.

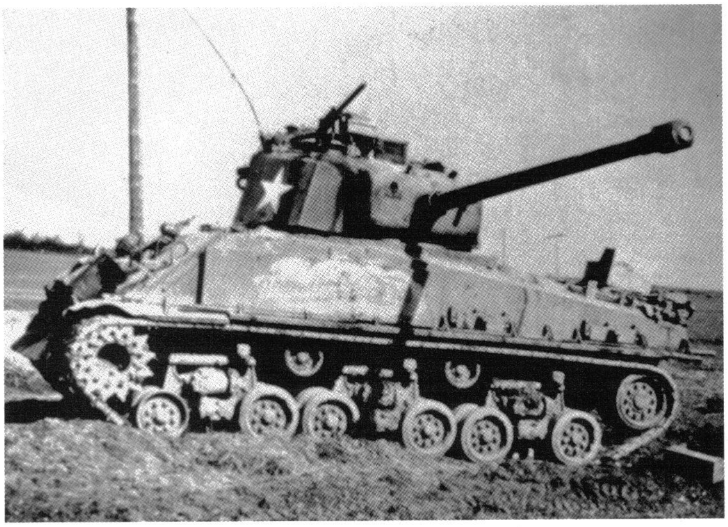
A scene all too common in the final months of the war in Germany, a knocked out M4A3 (76) of the 7th Armored Div. Many tanks were lost in skirmishes with small groups of German defenders armed with panzerfaust anti-tank rockets. About 11% of US tank casualties during the 1945 fighting were due to panzerfausts and other close range anti-tank weapons.

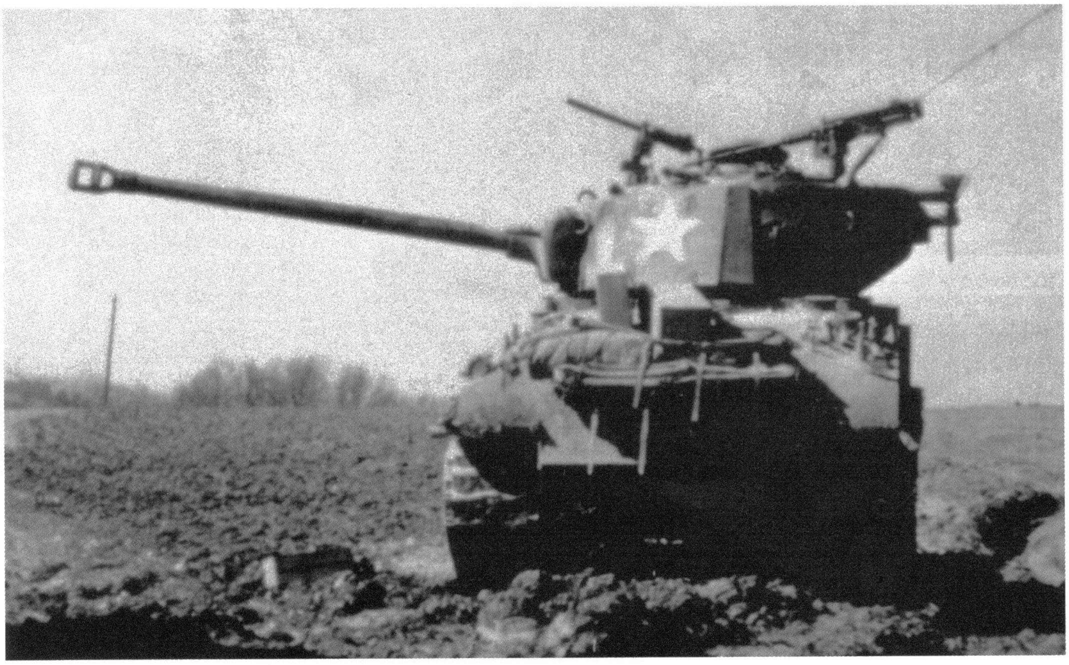




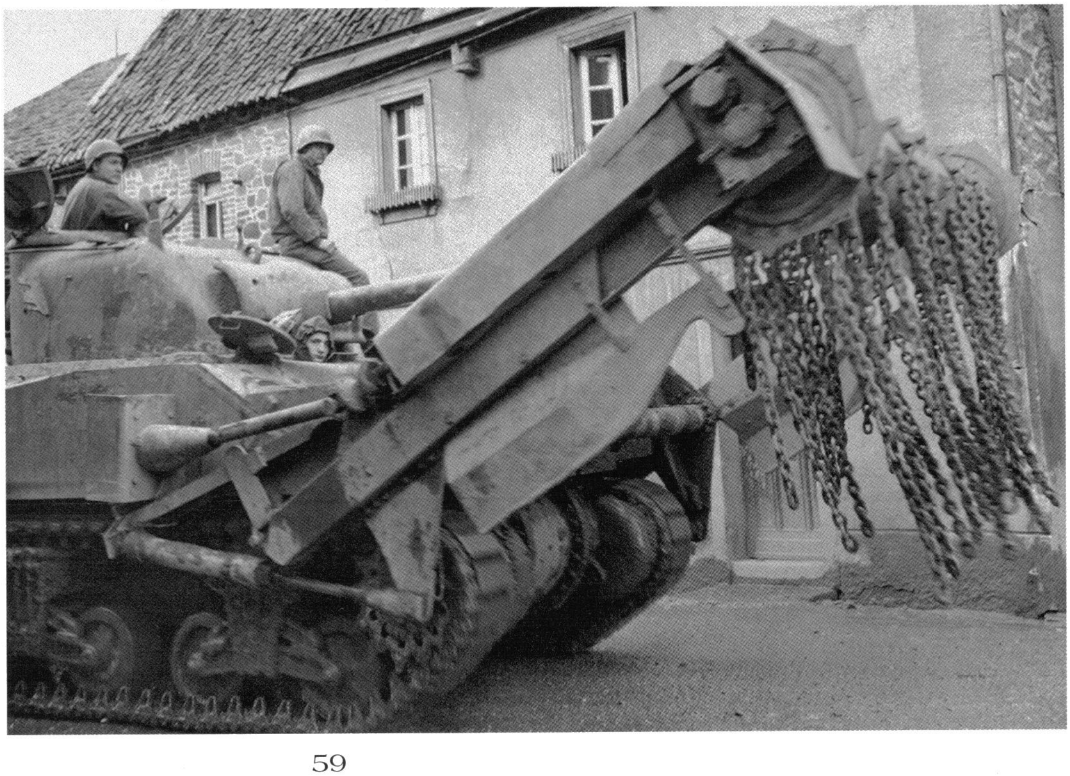
In February 1945, the ordnance workshops of Patton's Third Army began up-armoring M4 tanks with armor from knocked out tanks. This is a M4A3E8 of the 4th Armored Division with a typical package of armor on the hull and turret.

This is the M4A3E8 command tank of Col. Creighton Abrams of the 4th Armored Div. in March 1945. Like many tanks of Patton's Third Army, it has been retrofitted with added armor on the hull front, hull sides, and turret. This is his seventh M4, named "Thunderbolt VII" as can be seen on the side applique armor. (Patton Museum)

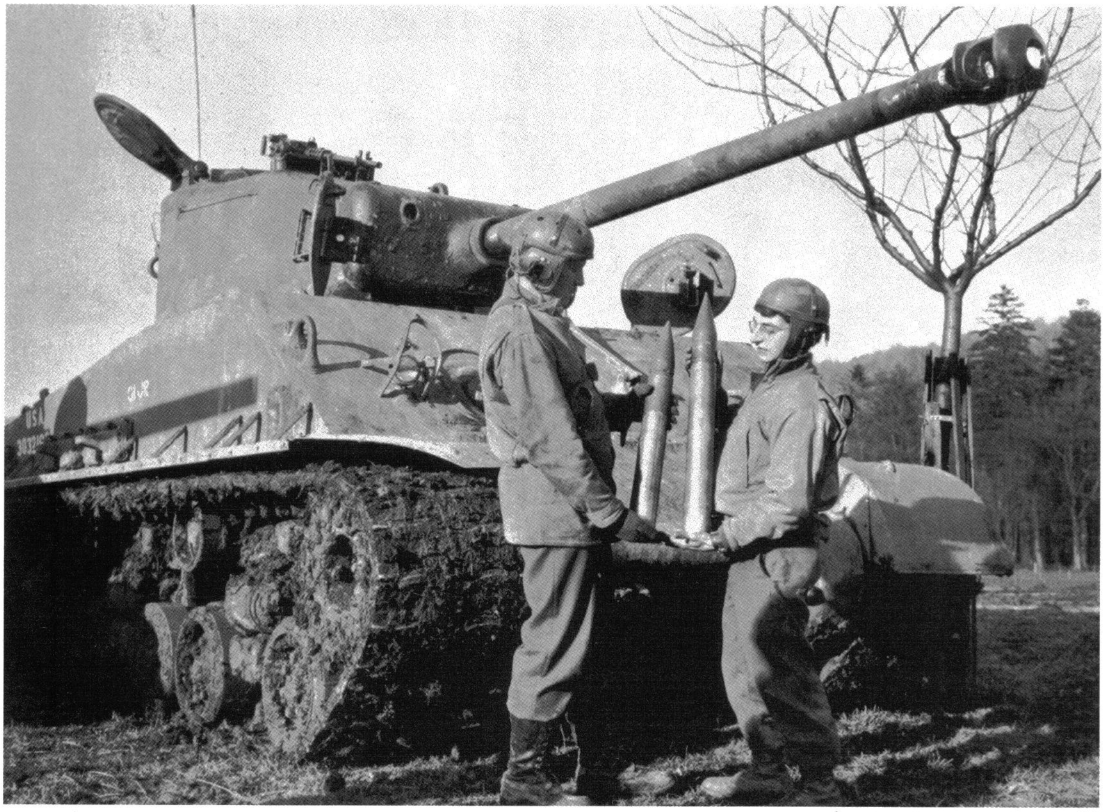




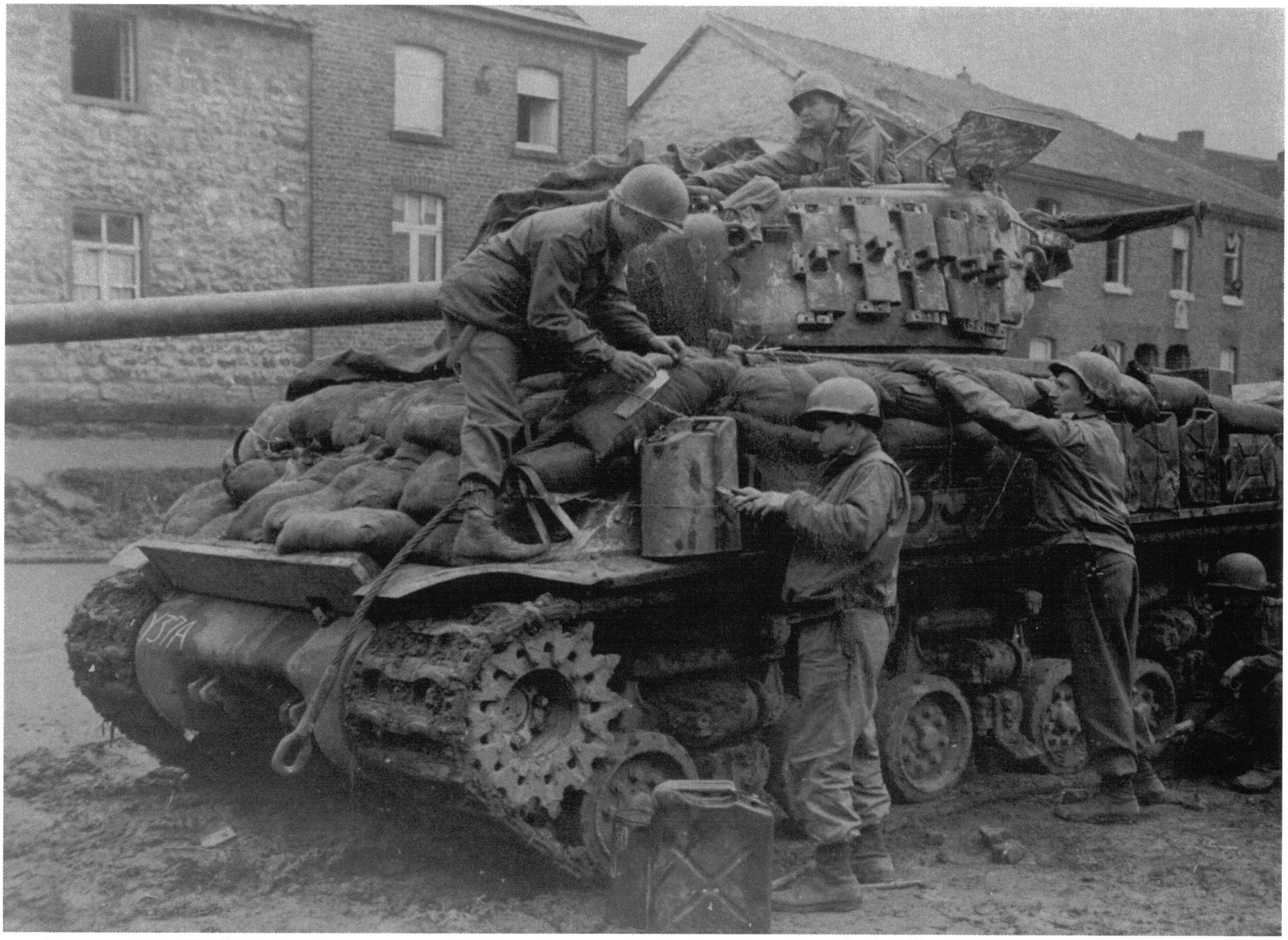
This other view of Abrams M4A3E8 gives a better view of the turret armor. Abrams crew also mounted a .30 cal machine gun on the cover over the gunner's sight. (Patton Museum)



A small number of Crab flail tanks were obtained from British sources and served with 739th Tank Bn. (Special). Their use to breach a minefield on 30 January 1945 was a failure when two Crabs were knocked out by German guns, two were lost to mines, and one suffered a mechanical breakdown. The remaining Crabs were used in February and March in attempts to clear minefields on the approaches to the Roer and Rhine rivers. This is a Crab in operation near Vicht on the Roer river approaches on 21 February 1945.

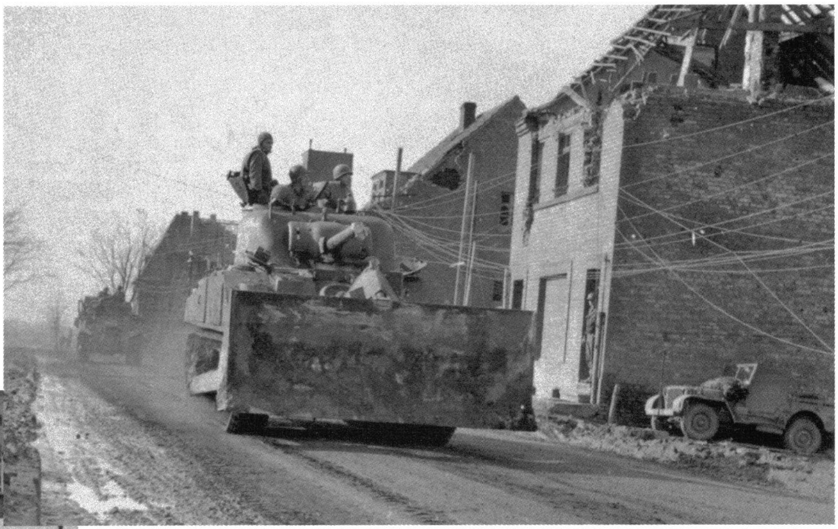


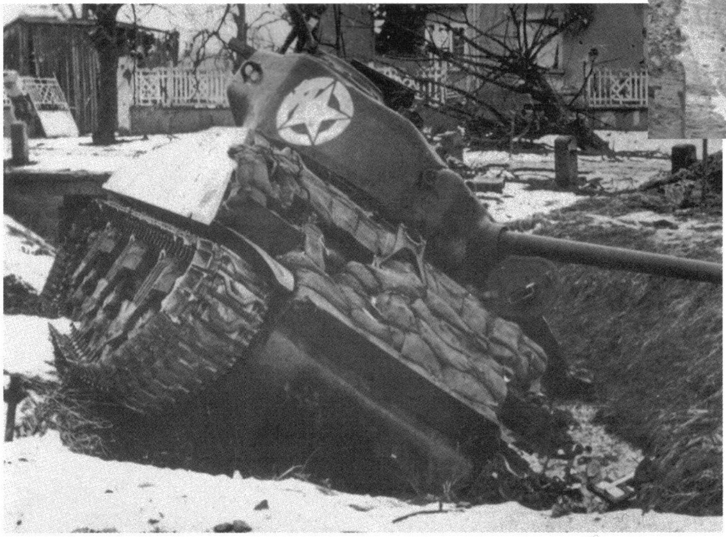
The first M4A3E8 tanks began being issued in January 1945. These used the new HVSS suspension which improved the mobility of the M4 in muddy terrain due to the use of a wider track. These two tankers from 66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. are taking part in a press briefing at Teuven, Netherlands on 22 February 1945 where they are showing the difference in size between the 75mm and 76mm projectiles while standing in front of one of the new M4A3E8 tanks.



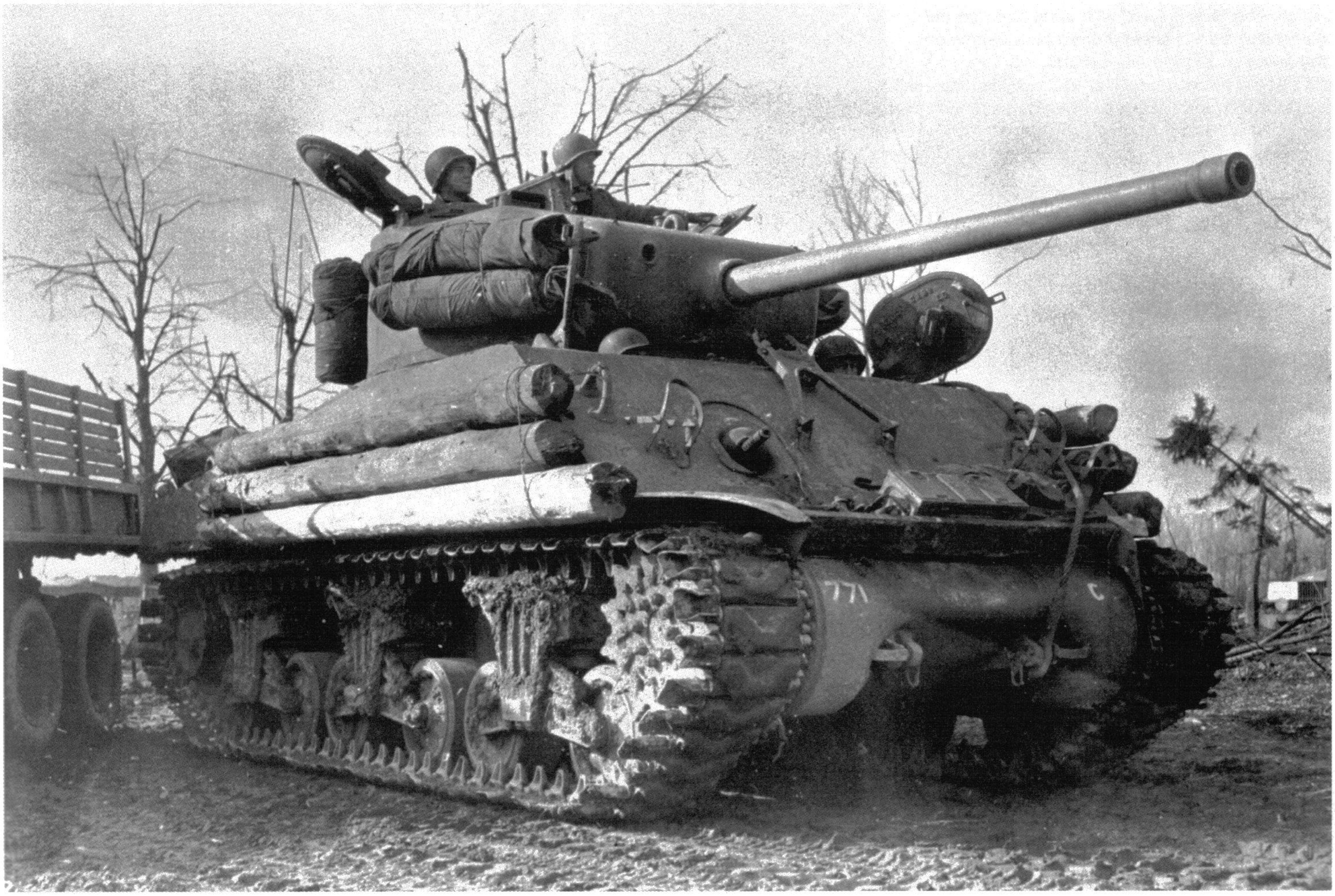
New or not, the M4A3E8 tanks were soon covered with applique armor in the form of sand-bags and spare track blocks. This is a tank of A/18th Tank Bn., 8th Armored Div. at Bocholtz, Netherlands on 23 February 1945.

A M4 dozer tank of the 5th Armored Div. moves forward through Ubach during the Operation "Grenade" on 24 February 1945.

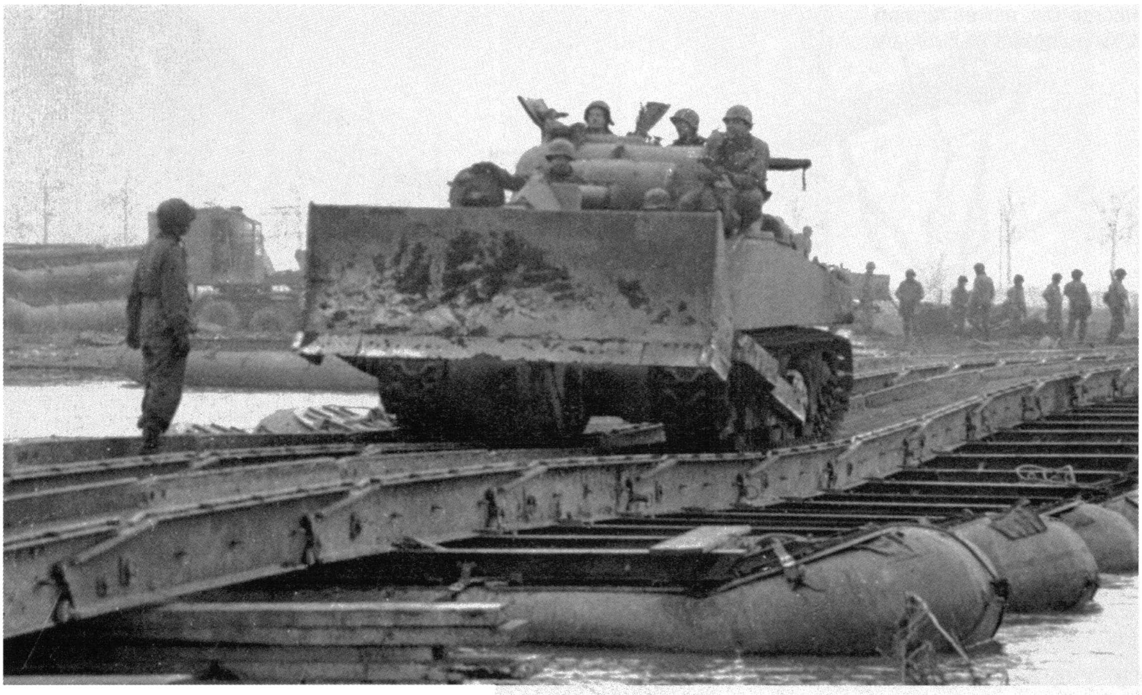




A M4A3 (76) knocked out during the fighting in Germany late February 1945. The design of the Allied star is somewhat unusual. The tank is fitted with metal chevron tracks and duck bill extenders, as well as a full array of sand-bag armor on the glacis plate.

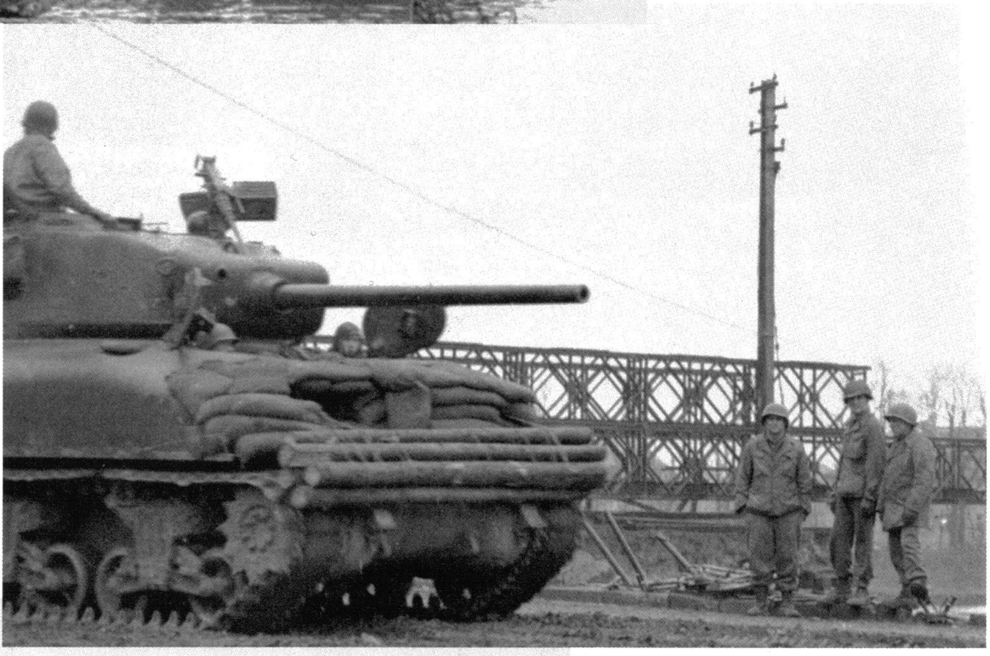


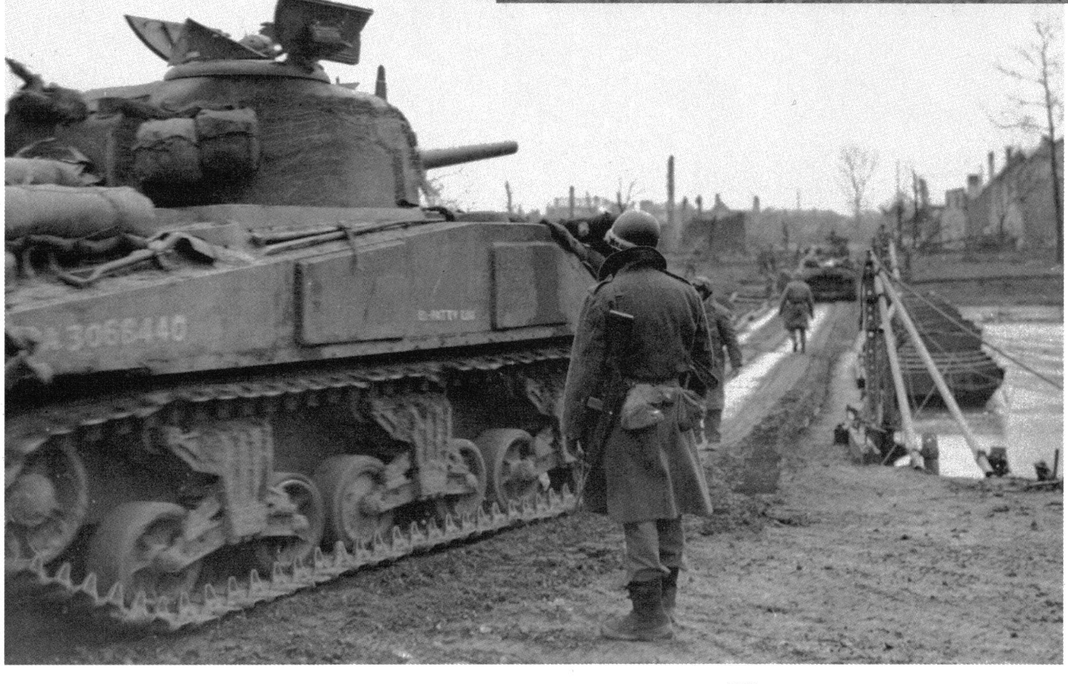
A M4 (76) of Co. C, 771st Tank Bn. sets out from Linnich, Germany while supporting the 84th Division during the Roer offensive.



A M4 dozer tank crosses a pontoon bridge over the Roer river on 24 February 1945. Operation "Grenade" finally succeeded in overwhelming the German defense along the Roer river after months of bloody fighting by the Ninth Army.

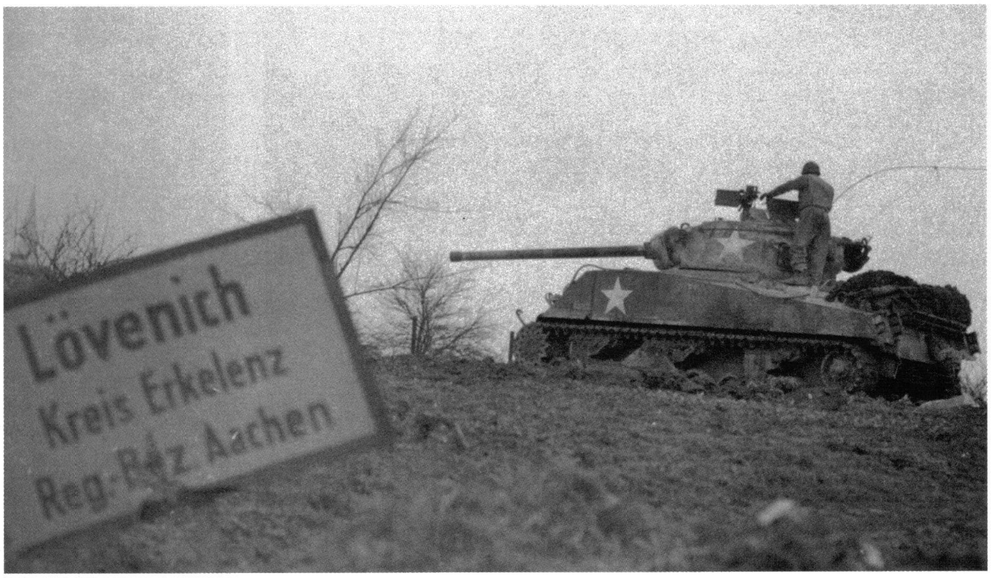
A M4A1 (76) moves past one of the double Bailey bridges erected over the Roer near Julich. The tank is fitted with sand-bags on the glacis and carries several unditching beams on the nose.

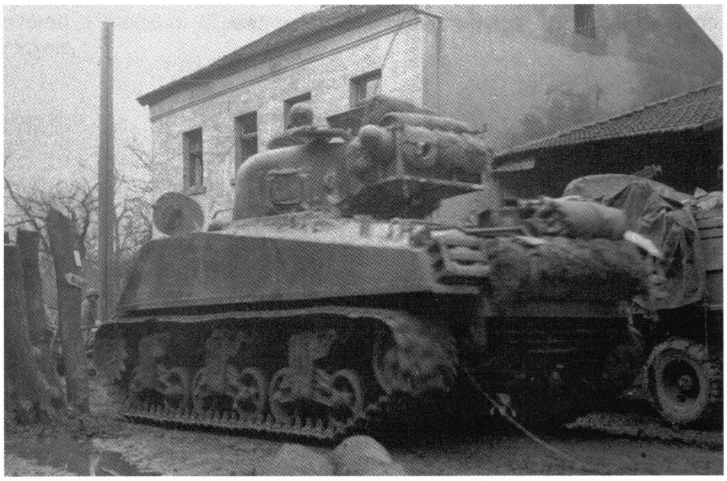




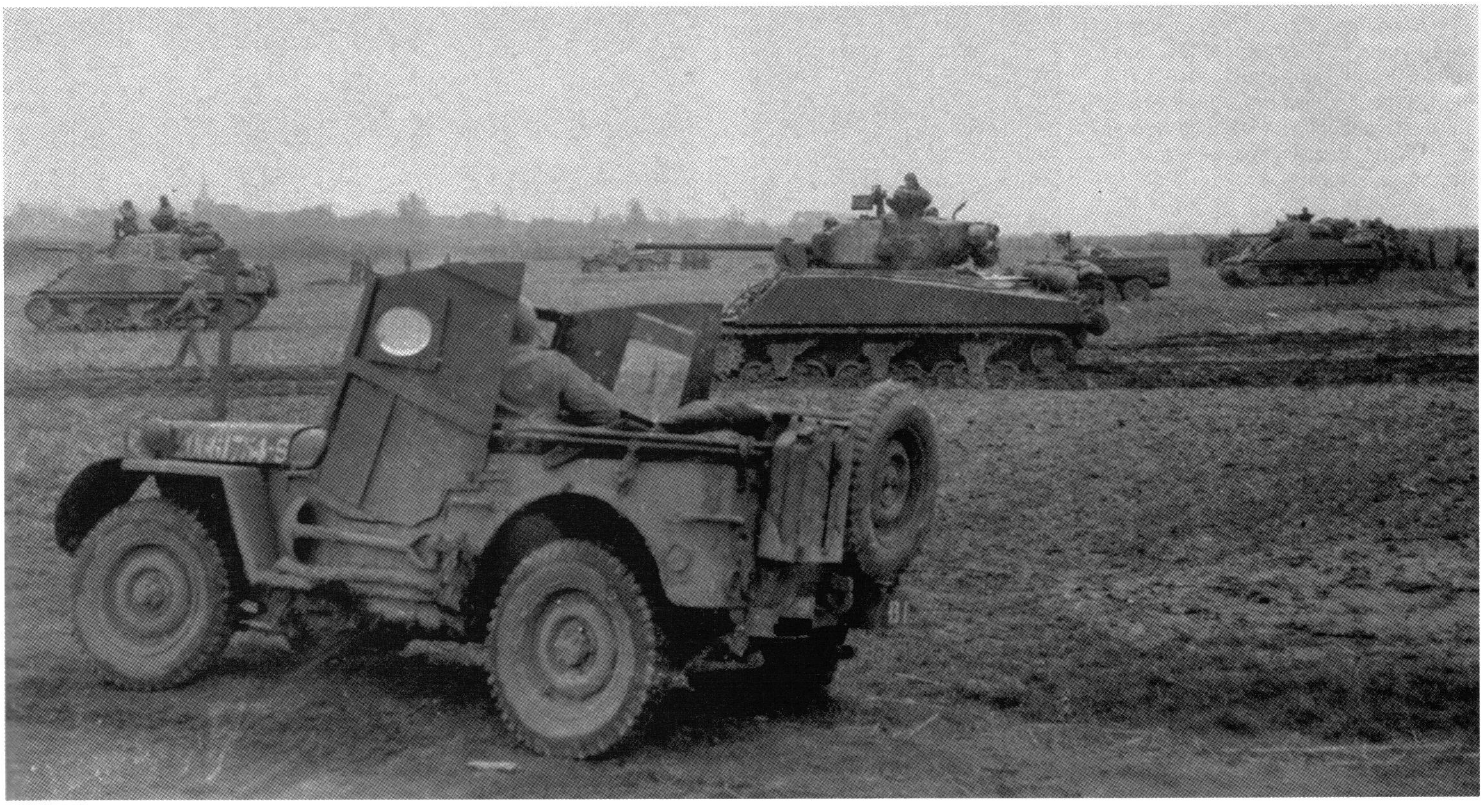
A M4 named "Lil-Patty-Lou" of the 2nd Armored Div. is directed by an MP to the treadway bridge over the Roer at Julich on 26 February 1945.

A M4A3 (76) of the 701st Tank Bn. near Lovenich on 25 February. The unit had lost 22 tanks the day before to German anti-tank guns and obstacles while supporting the 405th Infantry near Hottorf, a bloody reminder that the war was not yet over.

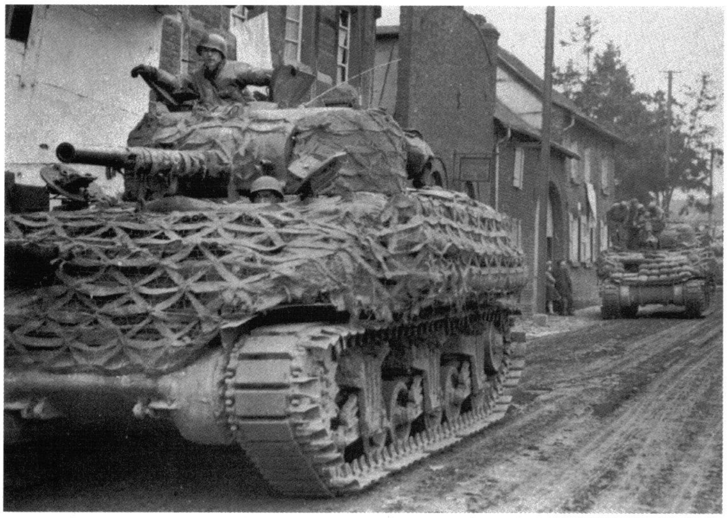




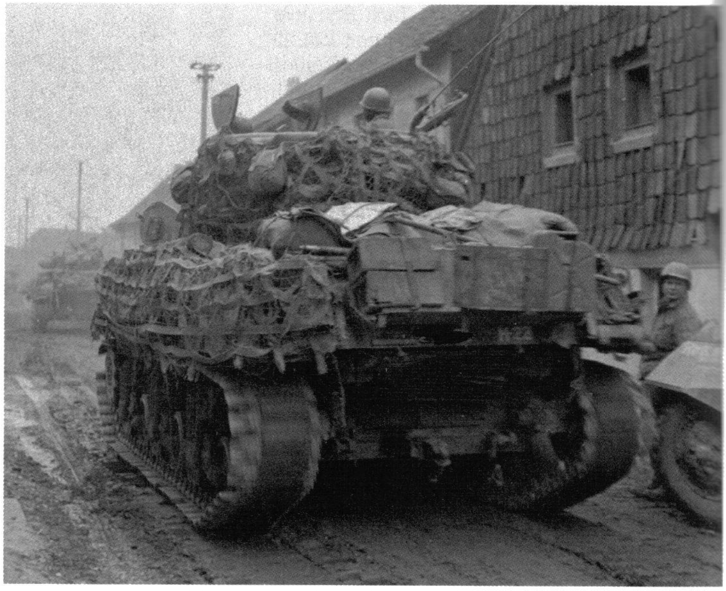
A M4A3 of the 5th Armored Div. moves through Lovenich on 27 February 1945 during the exploitation phase of Operation "Grenade". The crew has created a large rack on the back of the turret to stow personal gear.



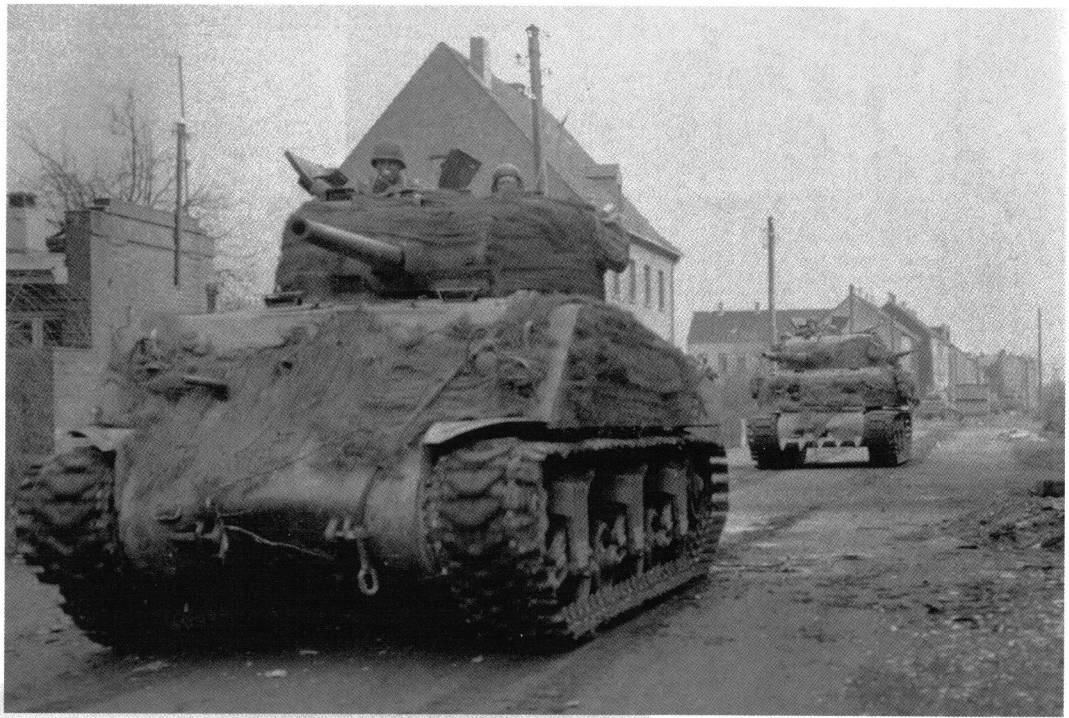
Tanks of the 5th Armored Div. form up in the outskirts of Rheindahlen, Germany on 1 March 1945. The jeep in the foreground has had improvised mud guards added on either side.



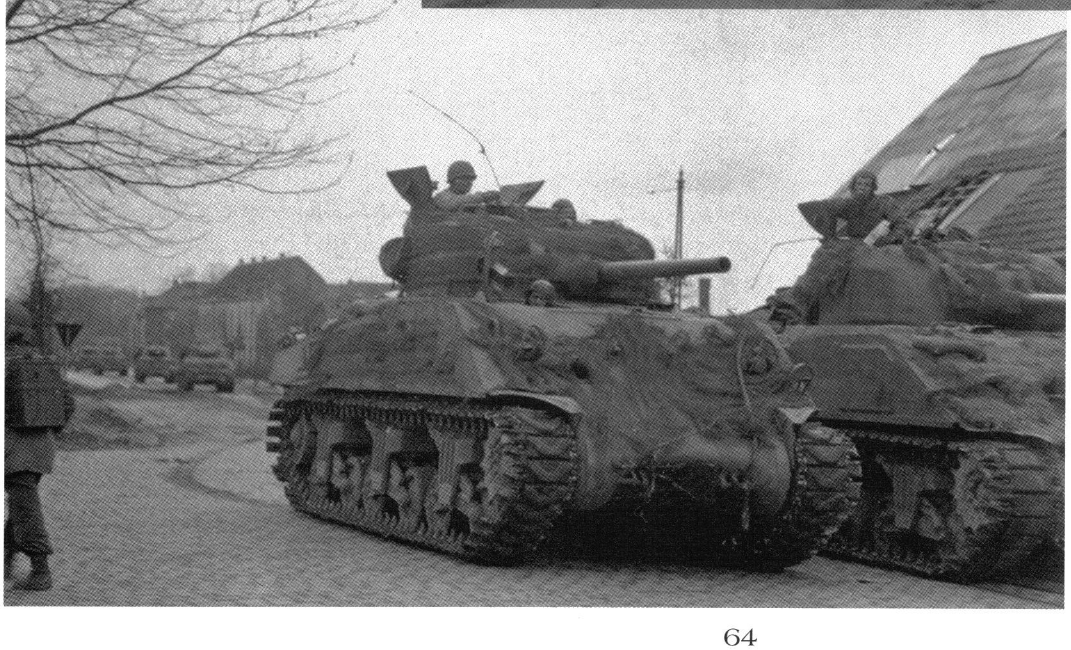
Co. H, 67th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Division pass through Priesterath, Germany on 28 February while on the way to the Rhine. This M4 is heavily decked in artillery camouflage net over the sand-bag applique armor. With ground conditions drying, the tanks are returning to the use of the T51 rubber block track, but fitted with duck bill extenders.



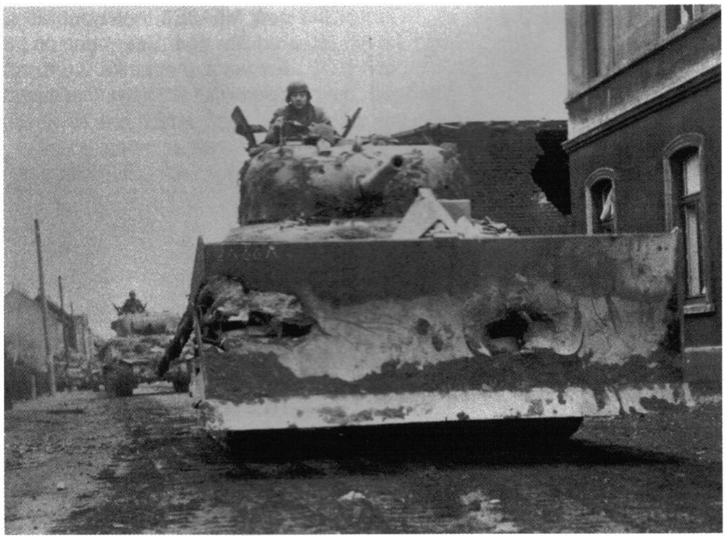
A rear view of the same column from 2nd Armored Div. in Priesterath showing the typical heavy stowage on the rear deck.



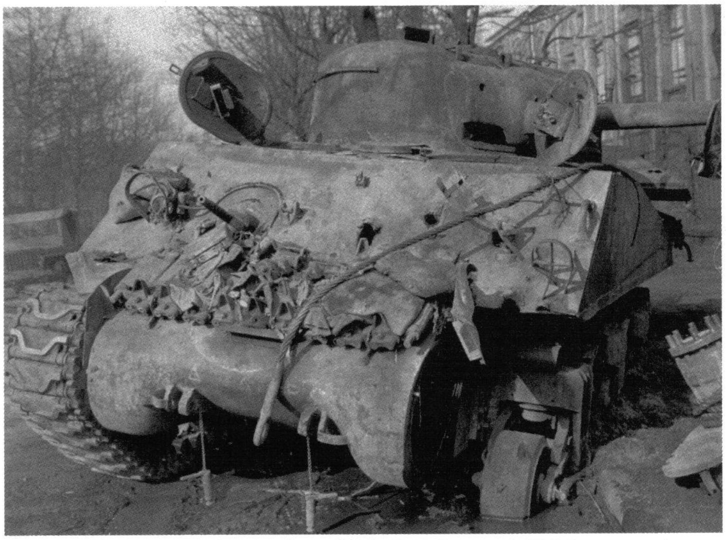
A column of well camouflaged M4A3 tanks of 2nd Armored Div. move through Krefeld on 2 March 1945 during the assault towards the Rhine. Curiously enough, the second tank in the column is still fitted with a Culin hedgerow cutter.



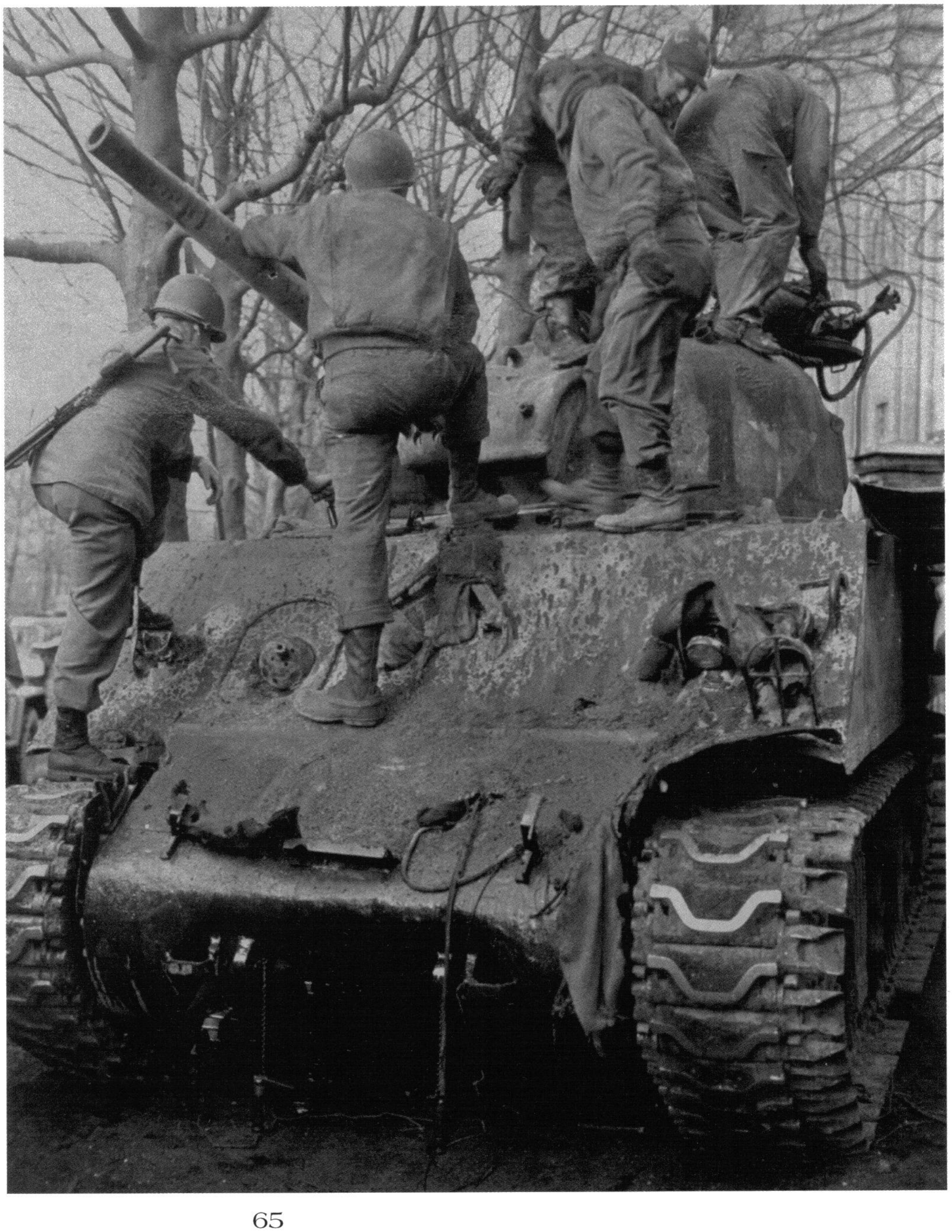
A pair of tanks from the 2nd Armored Division in Krefeld on 3 March during the advance on the Rhine. A large amount of armor was sent through the town as the positions on the opposite side of the Rhine were held by the Panzer Lehr Division.



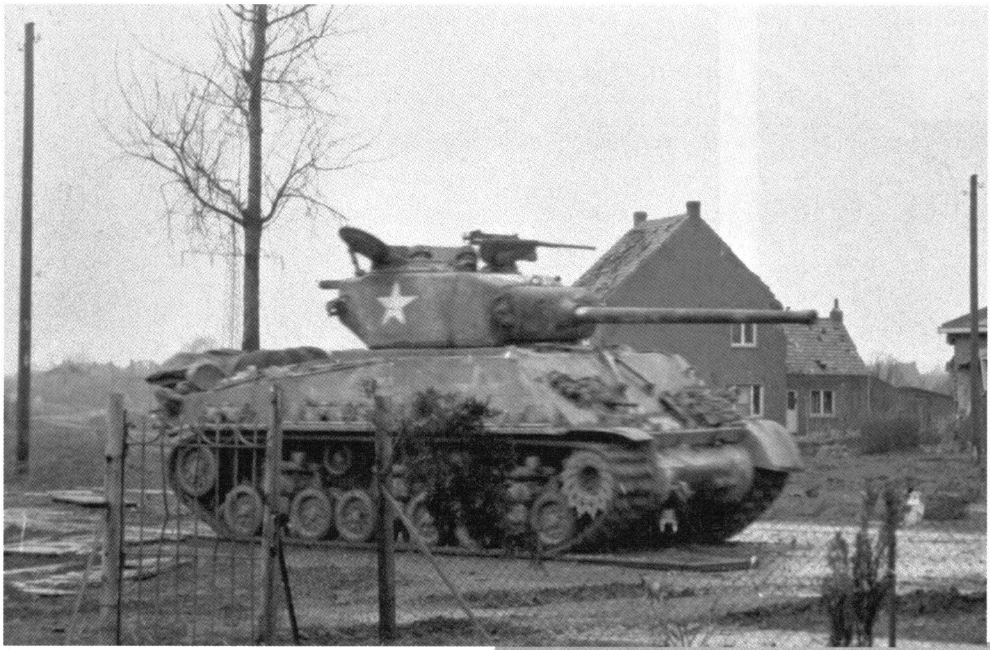
A curious photo of a dozer tank of 66th Arm'd Regt., 2nd Armored Div. with two large holes blown in the blade. Many units used dozer tanks to lead columns if M4A3E2 Jumbo assault tanks were not available, since the dozer offered a measure of stand-off protection against panzerfaust anti-tank rockets.



Task Force Van Houton from CCB, 2nd Armored Division was given a rough reception during the fighting for Rheinberg on the west bank of the Rhine on 9 March 1945. German anti-tank guns and panzerfausts knocked out 39 of the 54 tanks used in the attack. This M4A3 took five hits, one of them completely shearing off the left drive sprocket.

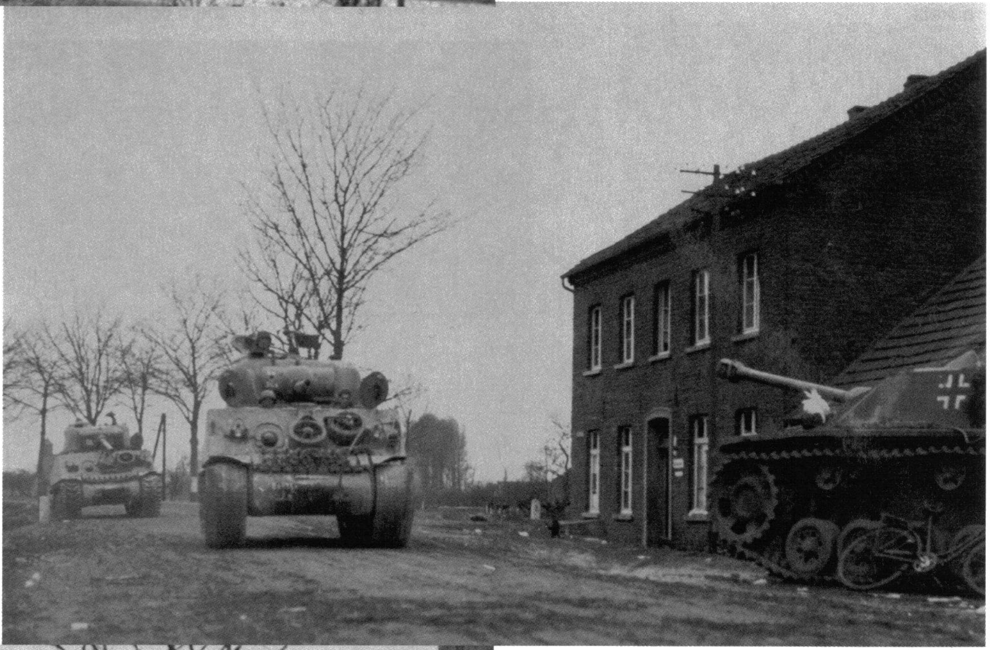


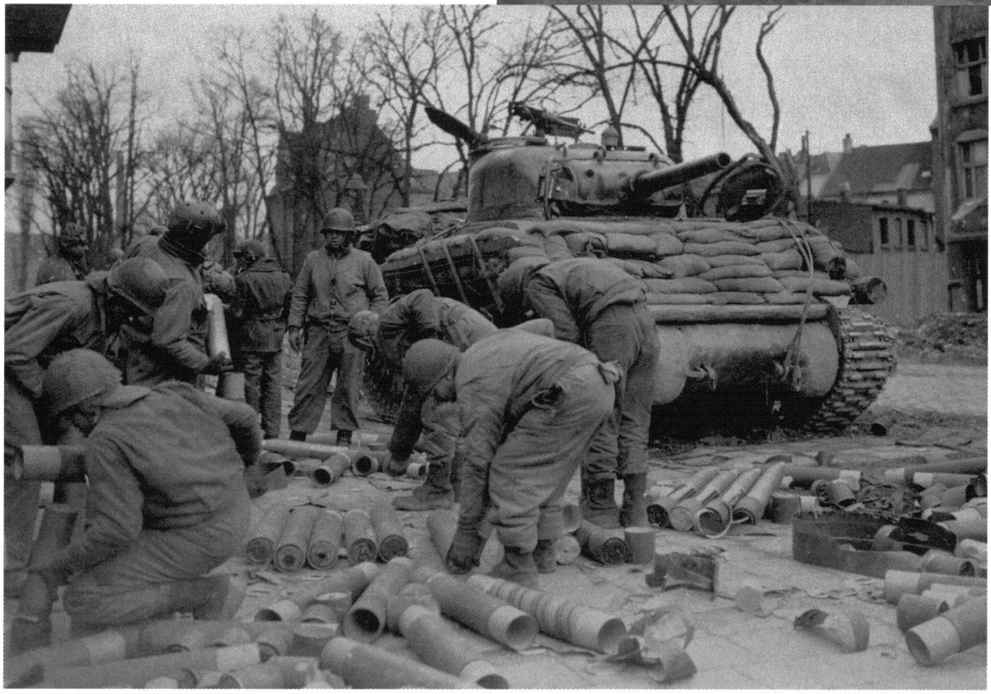
Crews from the 2nd Armored Div. try to pry open the hatch of a M4A3 knocked out in the street fighting in Rheinberg to free a wounded crewman. The attack was so costly due to the lack of supporting infantry and the expectation that the town would not be so heavily defended.



One of the new M4A3E8 tanks operating with the 8th Armored Div. near Roermund on 26 February 1945. Some of the tanks were not fitted with the muzzle brake so often associated with this type.

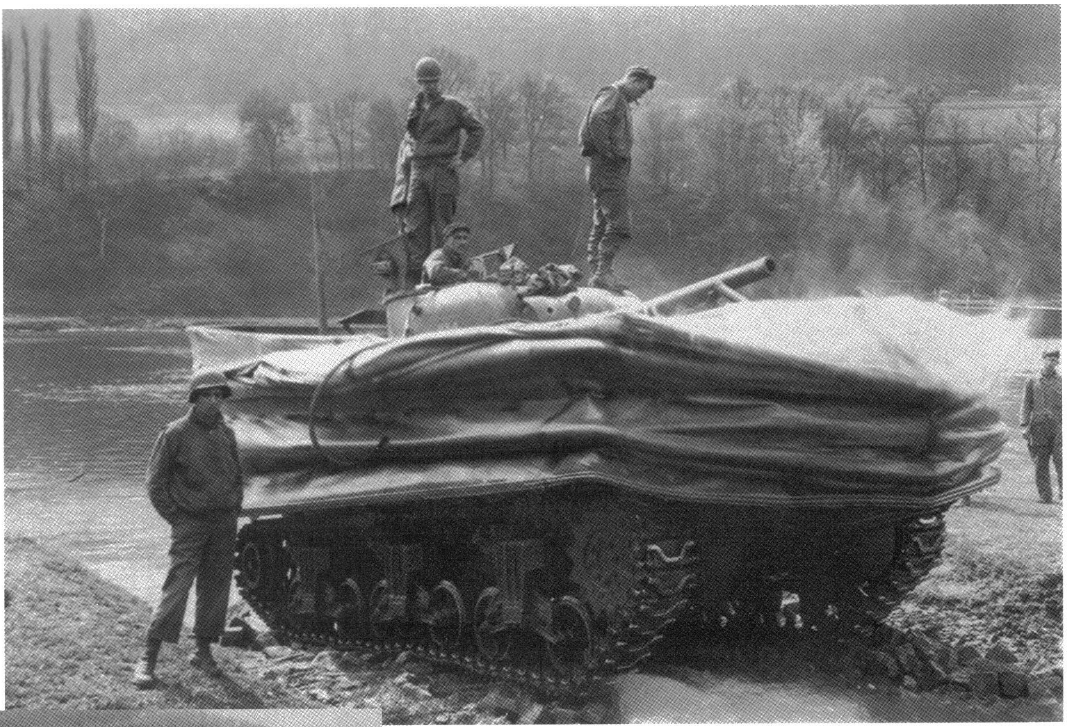
A column of M4A3 tanks of the 748th Tank Bn. pass by a knocked out StuG III assault gun in Replen, Germany on 6 March 1945 while supporting the 35th Division.

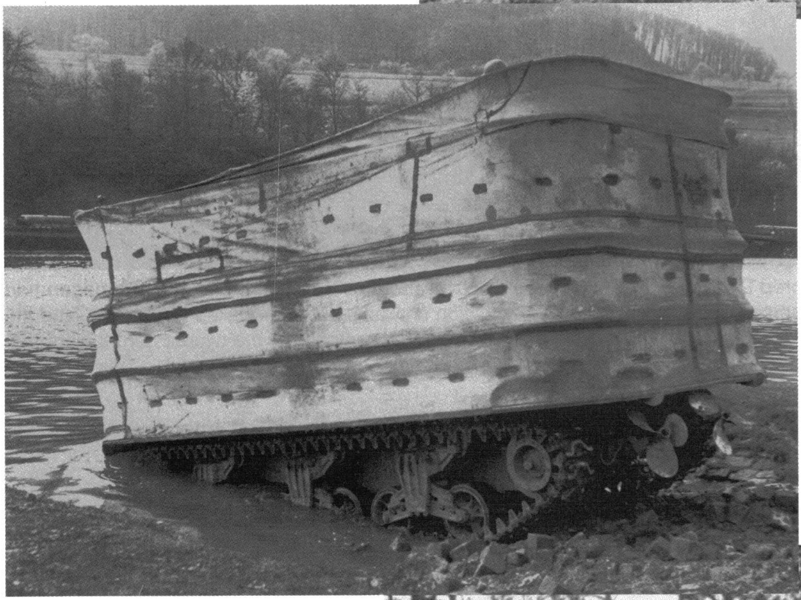




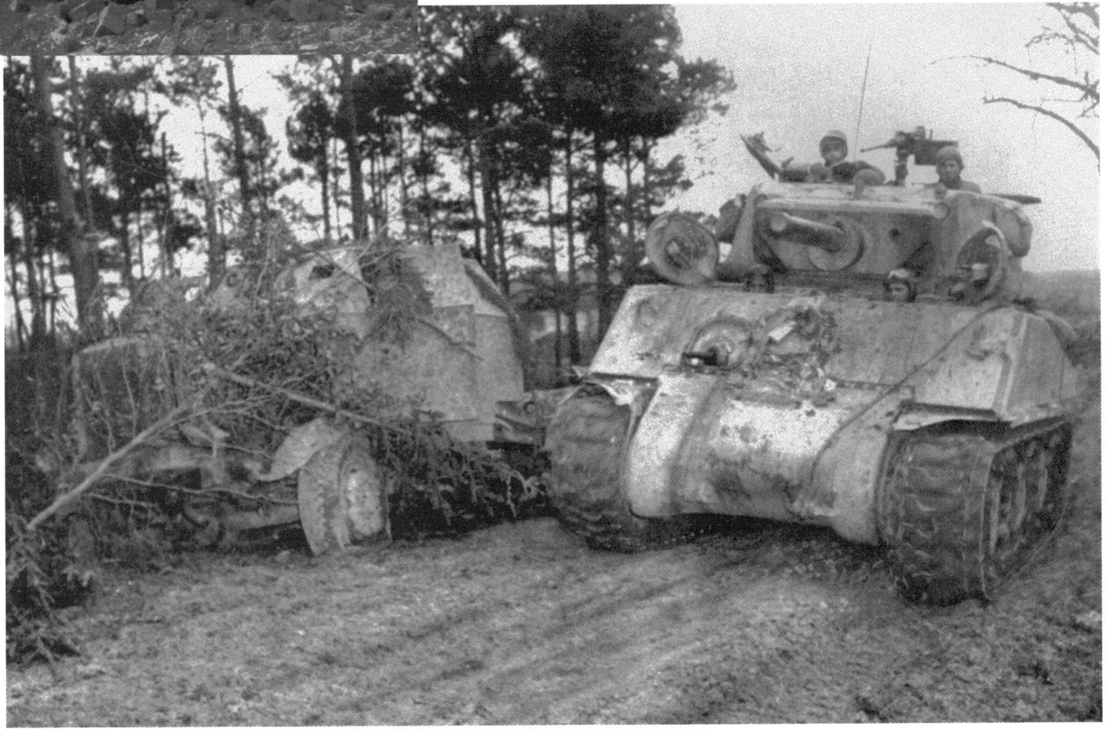
The HQ company of the 736th Tank Bn. prepares 105mm ammunition for their M4 (105) assault guns while supporting the 83rd Division near Neuss, Germany on 3 March 1945. The ammunition came packed in the fiberboard tubular containers seen on the ground.

In preparation for expected river crossing operations over the Rhine, a number of tank battalions were provided with DD tanks. This is a DD tank of the 781st Tank Bn. during a practice exercise near Binau with the floatation collar being erected.

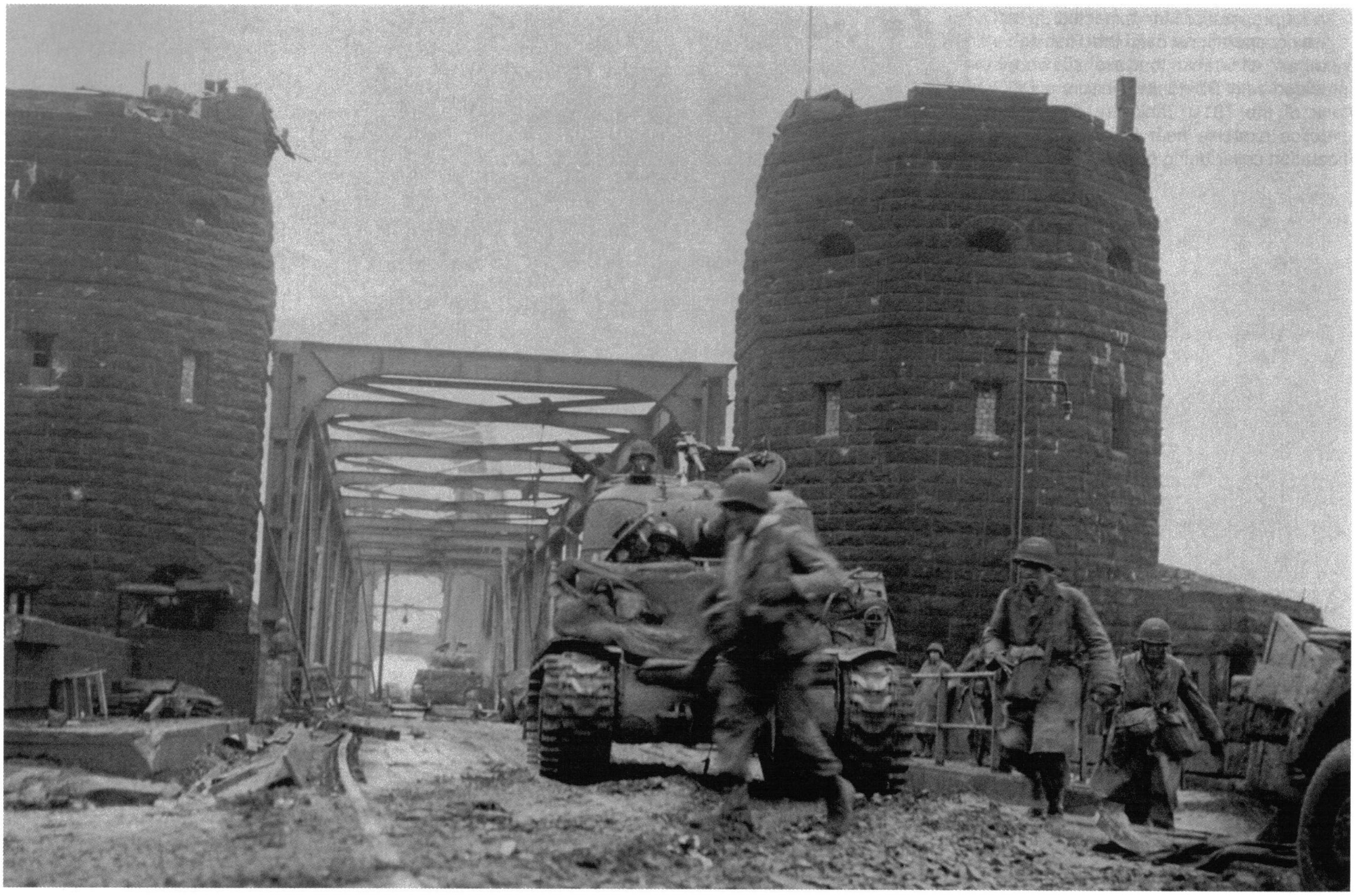




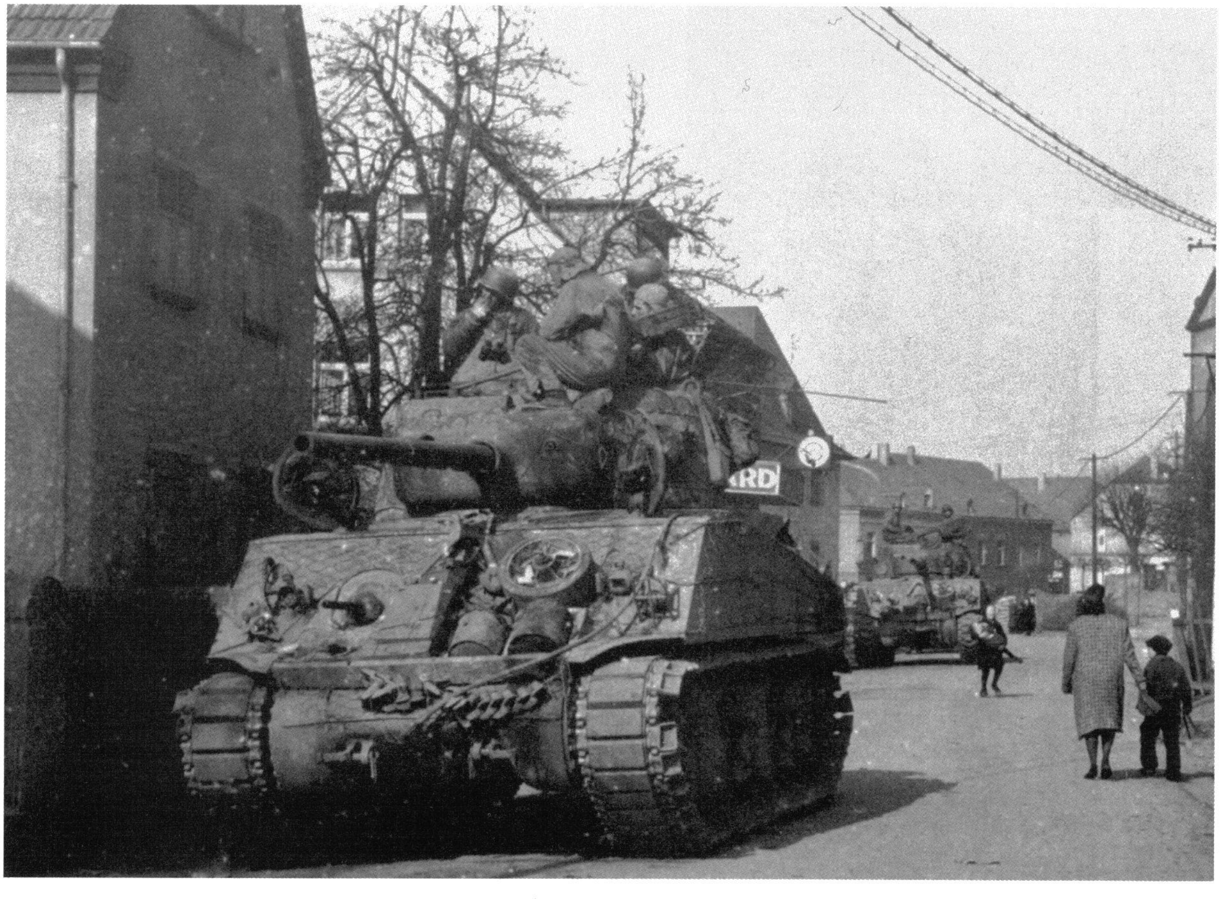
A DD tank from the 781st Tank Bn. enters the water after the floatation collar has been fully erected. The propellers can be seen at the rear of the tank. The 736th Tank Bn. swam 17 DD tanks across the Rhine on 24 March. But the 748th Tank Bn. with 51 DD tanks was only able to swim 8 over the Rhine due to damage to the floatation collars during transit.



A M4A3E2 of the 4th Armored Division passes by a destroyed German flak truck during the fighting on the western side of the Rhine in March 1944. Although the M4A3E2 was issued with a 75mm gun, Patton's Third Army units replaced it with a 76mm gun beginning in February 1945.

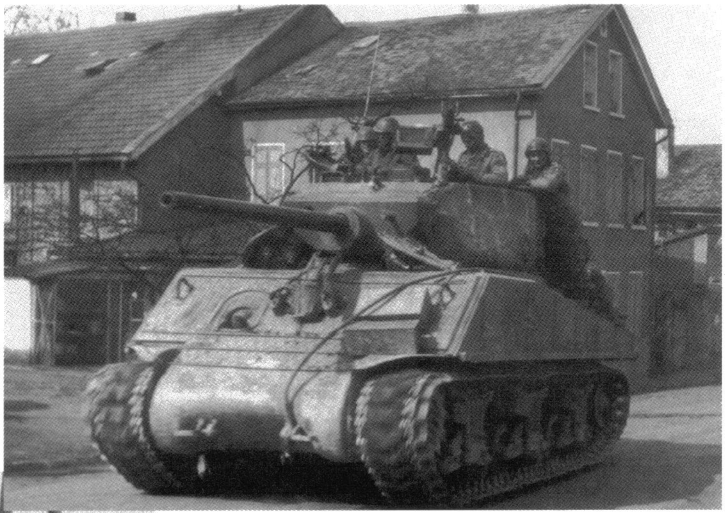


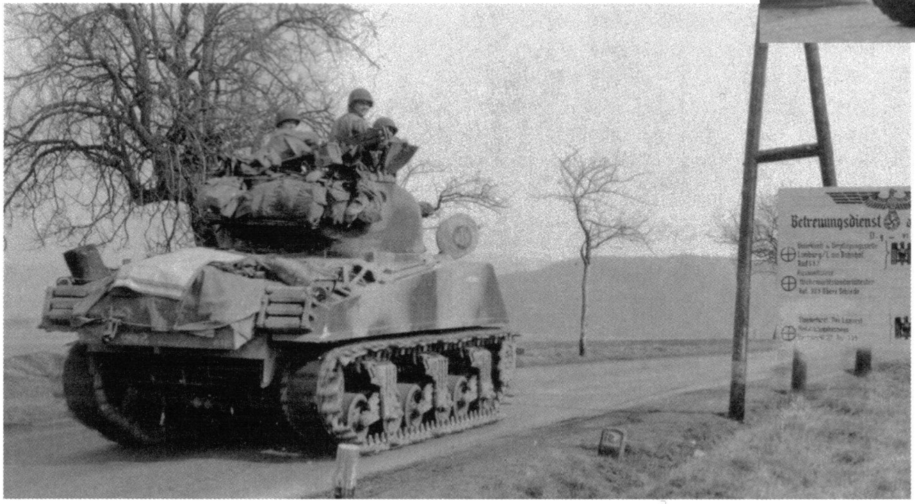
On 7 March, a task force of T26E3 heavy tanks from the 9th Armored Division was surprised to discover that the Ludendorff bridge at Remagen had not been demolished like all of the other Rhine bridges. The German garrison finally detonated the demolition charges, but some failed to explode, and the low grade commercial explosive that did detonate failed to drop the bridge. Here, a M4A3 tank of 14th Tank Bn. passes beyond the two eastern towers that had housed machine gun positions for the defense of the bridge shortly after the capture of the east bank.



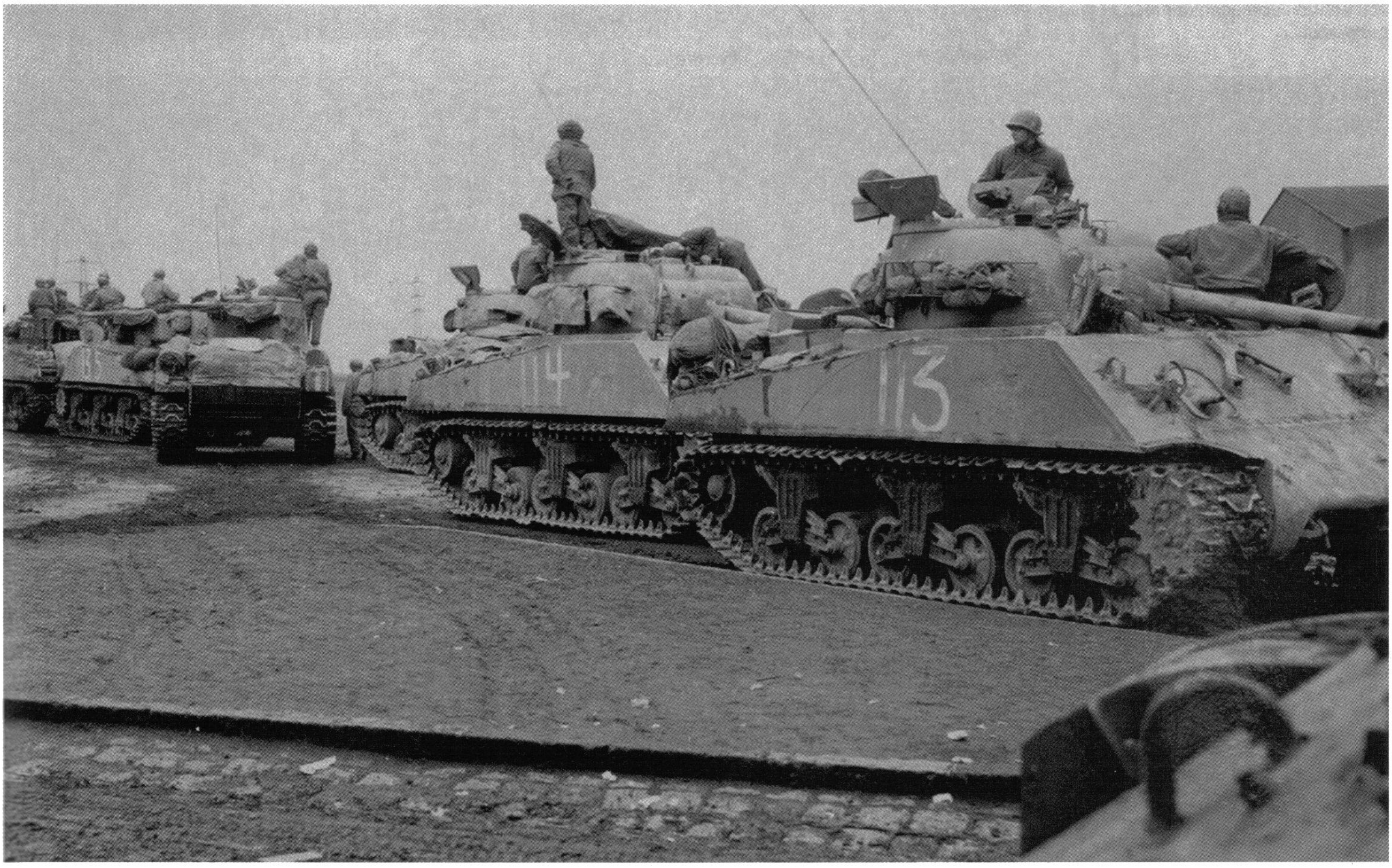
The crew of a M4A3 (76) tank eats lunch on the streets of Leutesdorf as the division expanded its bridgehead over the eastern bank of the Rhine river on 22 March 1945. The hull is fitted with Sommerfield matting.

A M4A3E2 Jumbo assault tank of the 37th Tank Bn., 4th Armored Div. passes thorough Alzey, Germany on 20 March 1945. This is another example of a M4A3E2 rearmed with a 76mm gun.

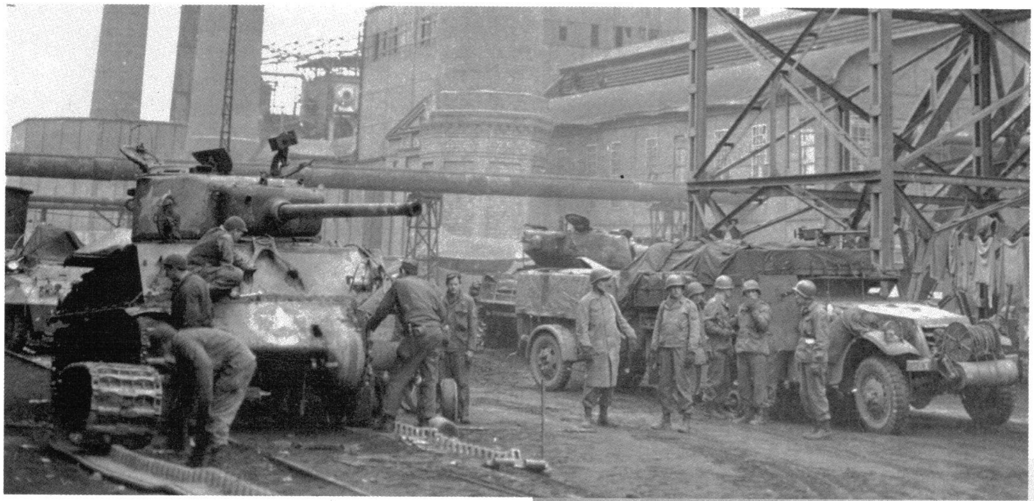




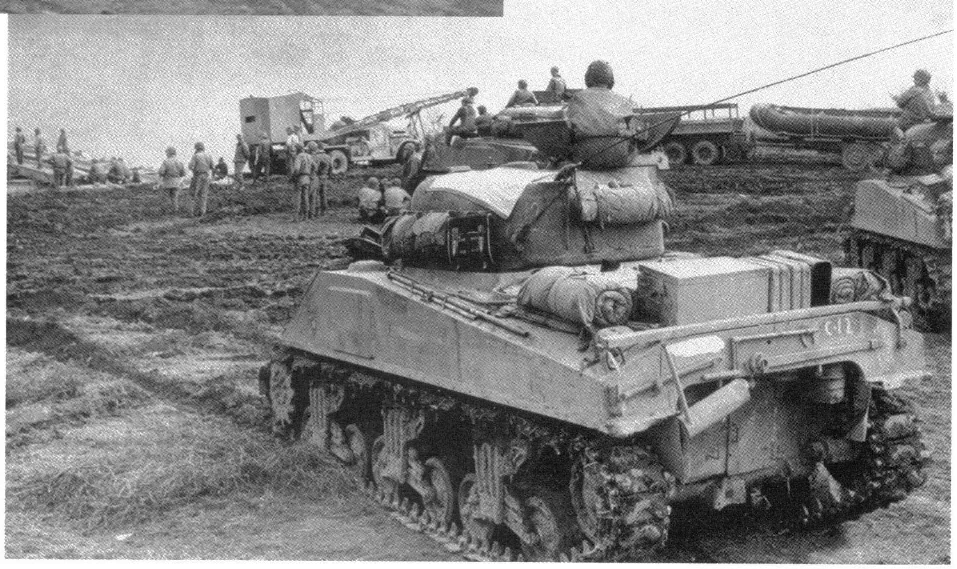
A camouflaged M4A3 moves up towards Limburg as the 9th Armored Division expands its Rhine bridgehead beyond Remagen on 27 March 1945.



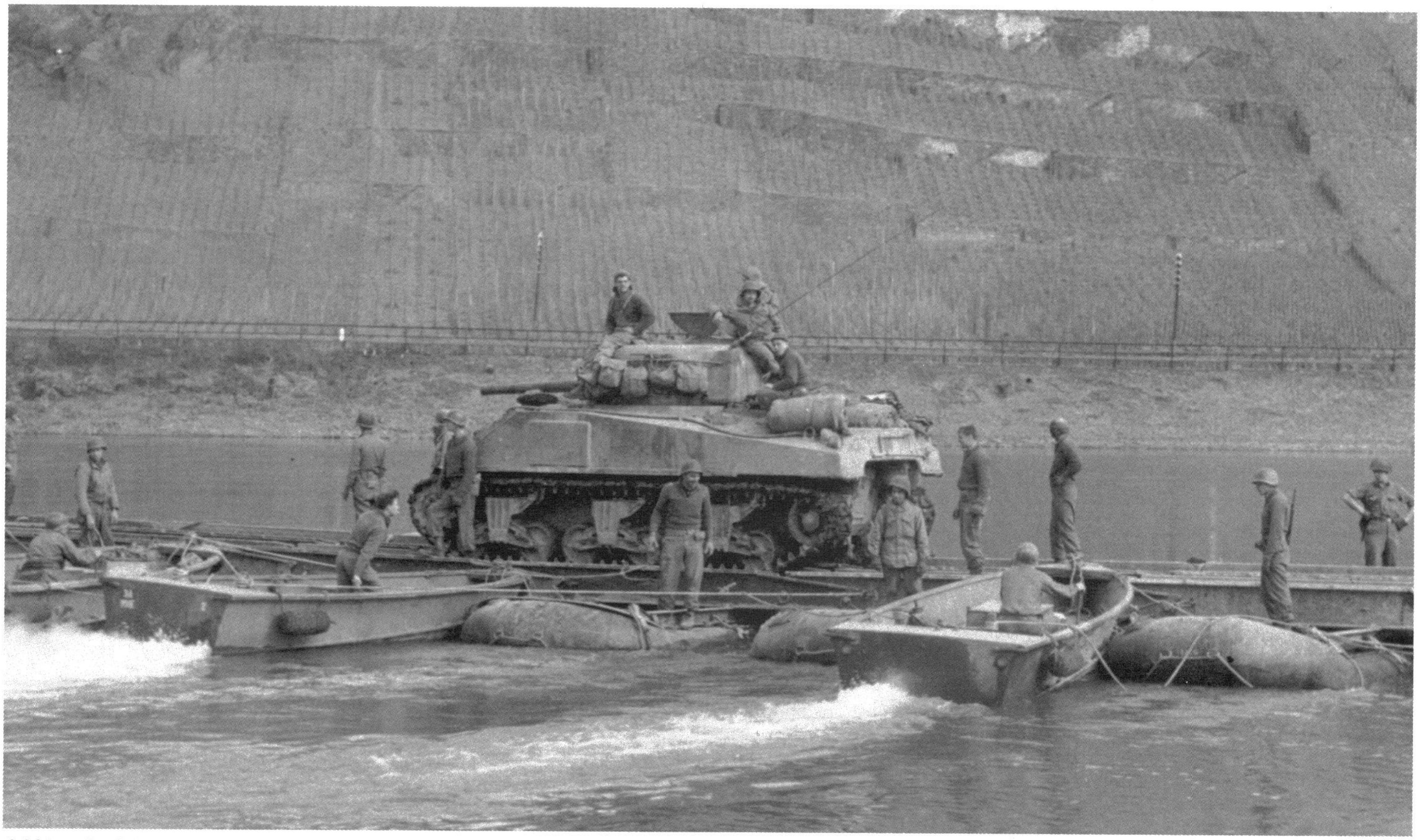
M4A3 tanks of the 11th Armored Division wait near Andernach on the west side of the Rhine as the Remagen bridgehead is expanded. They are painted with large tactical numbers on the hull side, peculiar to this unit.



The 8th Armored Division uses a coal mine in Lindford, Germany to act as a repair facility for their vehicles. To the left, a new M4A3E8 tank has its tracks repaired.

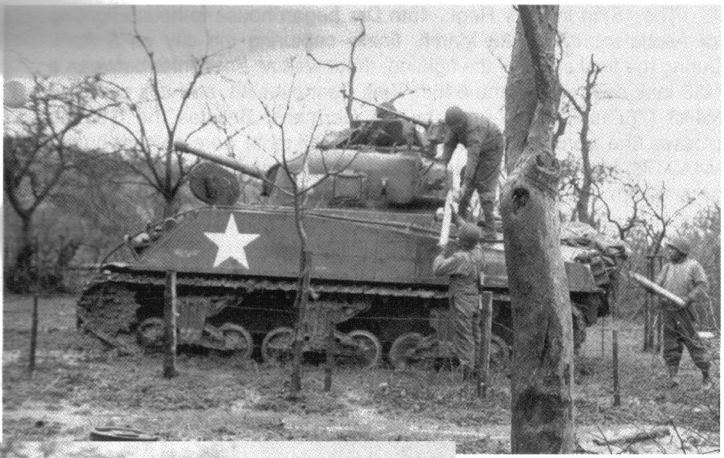


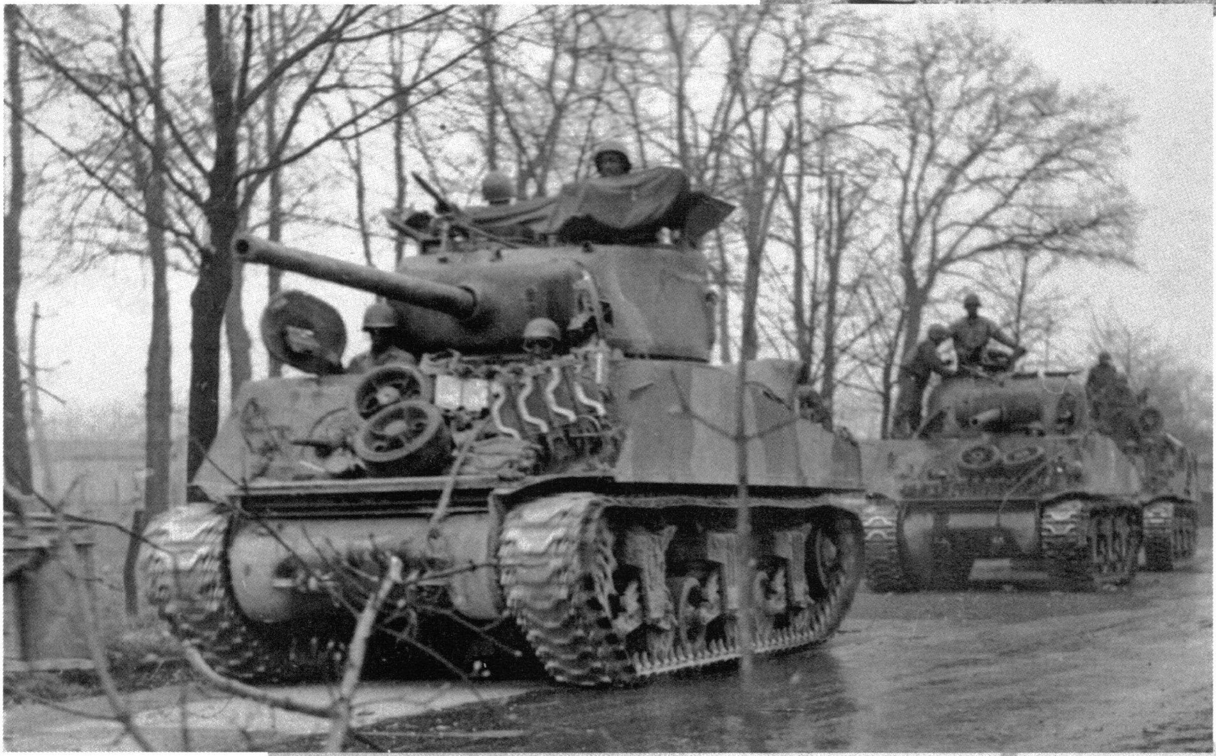
A M4 tank of Co. C, 735th Tank Bn. prepares to cross the Moselle river near Kobern while supporting the 87th Division's attack towards Koblenz on 16 March 1945. The tank crew has placed the fluorescent air identification panel on the turret roof.



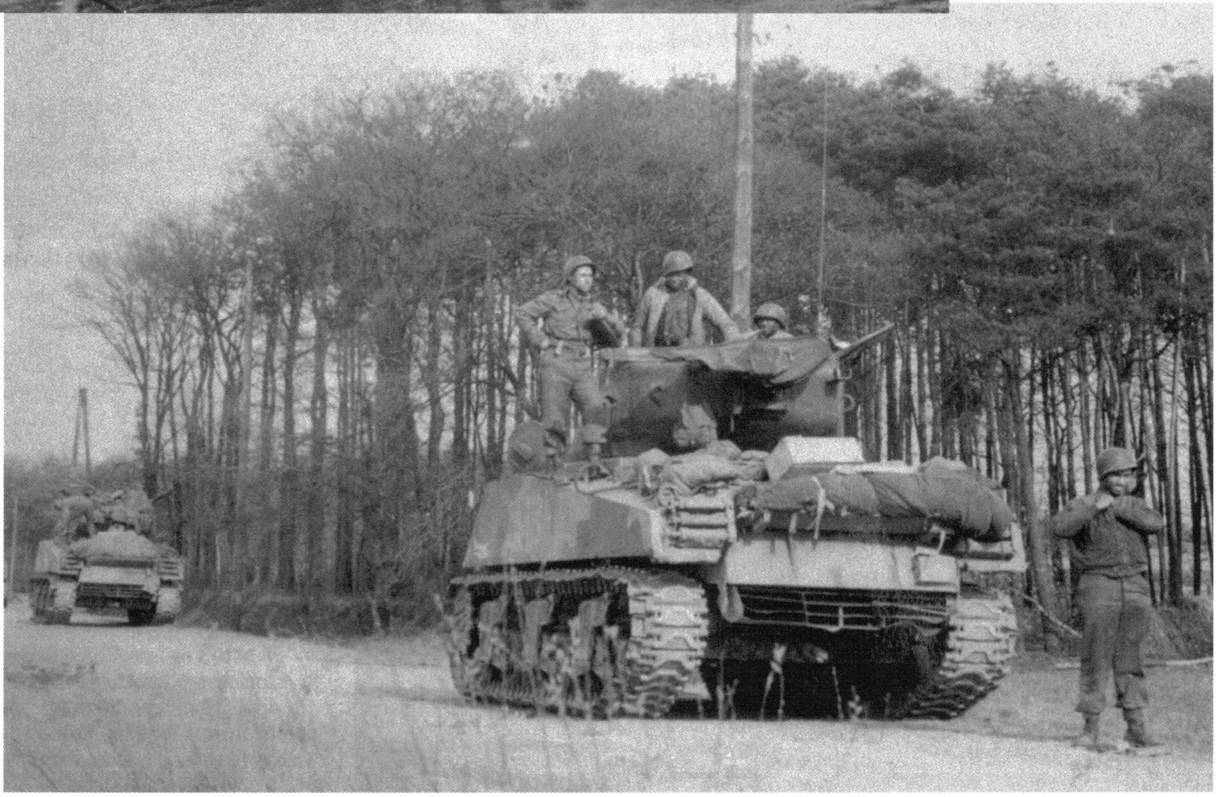
A M4 tank of the 735th Tank Bn. is ferried across the Moselle river by engineers on 16 March 1945.

A M4A3 of the 784th Tank Bn. (Cld) provides fire support for the 104th Division during fighting along the Rhine on 1 February 1945. This was one of two black tank battalions in the northwest Europe campaign in 1944-45.



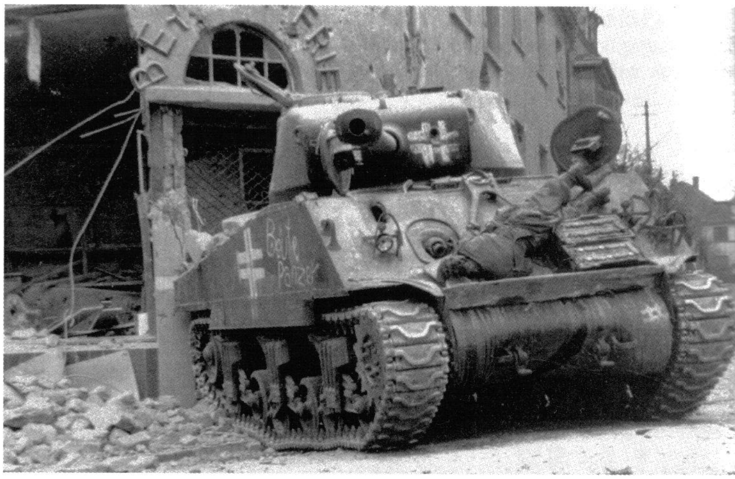


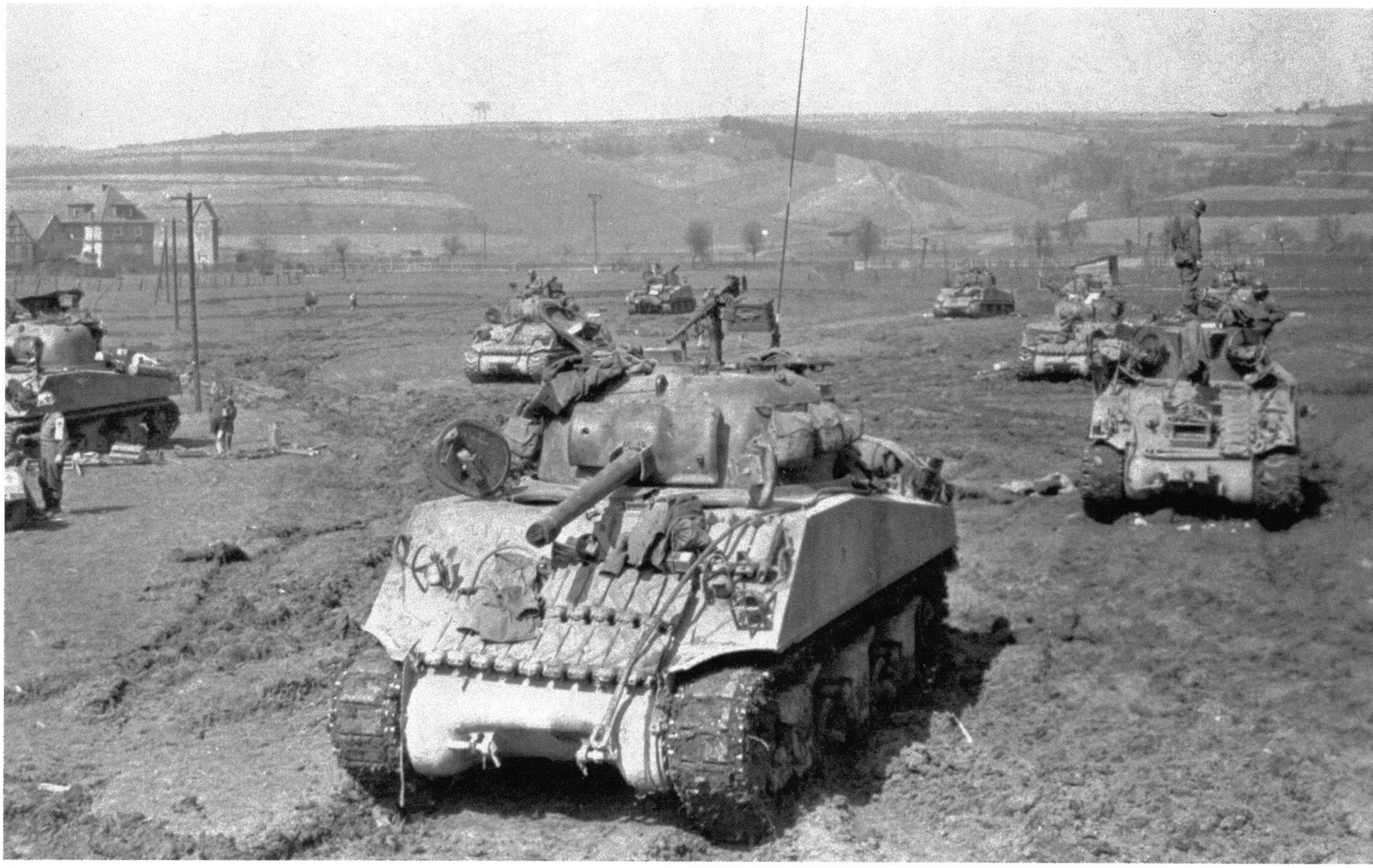
A M4A3 (76) of the 784th Tank Bn. (Cld) during fighting along the Rhine in March 1945. This tank is fitted with metal chevron track and duck bill extenders.



A M4A3 (76) of the 784th Tank Bn. (Cld) in operations near Dinslaken on 26 March 1945 while supporting the 35th Division.

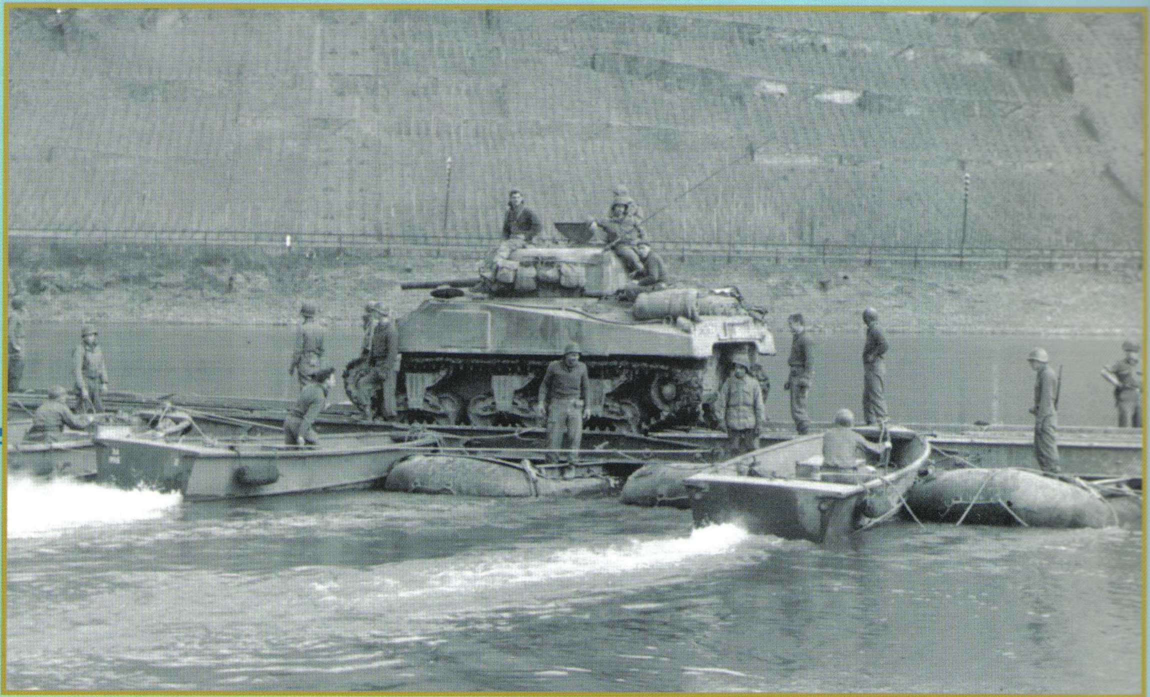
The 157th Infantry Regt., 45th Div. began house-to-house fighting for Aschafenburg on 28 March, finally capturing the city on 3 April. During the final stage of the fighting, there was an encounter between a M36 tank destroyer of the 645th Tank Destroyer Bn. and this captured M4A3 (76) tank being used by the Germans. Besides the German crosses, the words "Beute panzer" (captured tank) were painted on the M4A3 (76) to prevent German troops from firing on it. It was knocked out by a 90mm hit on the glacis plate evident above the right headlight. (Patton Museum)

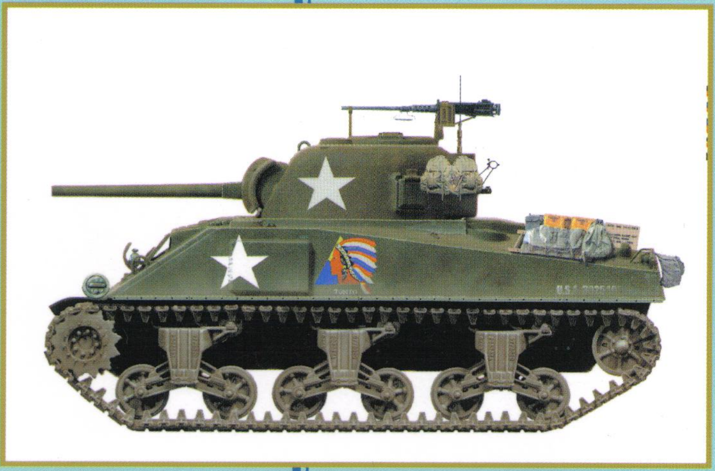




A column from the 9th Armored Division awaits orders in a farm field outside Westhousen, Germany on 10 April 1945. Behind and to the right of t
M4A3 is one of the new M32 armored recovery vehicles.

A M4A3 of Task Force Shaughnessy, CCR, 9th Armore
Division covers the Mulde river bridge in Colditz, Germany c
16 April 1945 shortly after the city was captured. Th
operation was famous for the seizure of the Colditz fortres
which was being used as a prisoner of war camp for 1,80
Allied soldiers.





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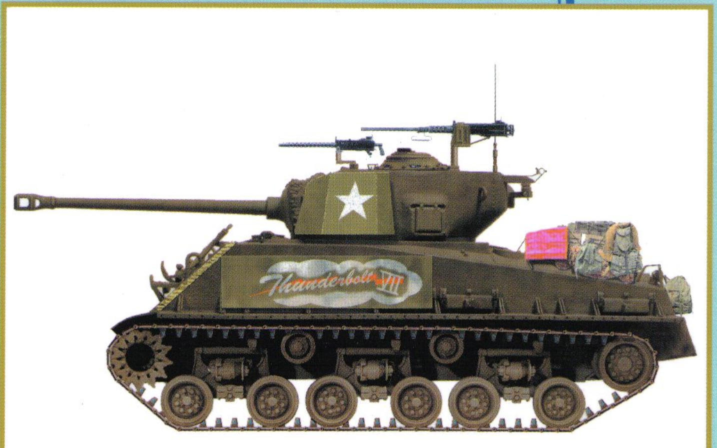
Thunderbolt VII